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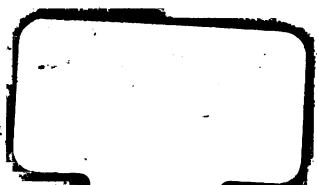
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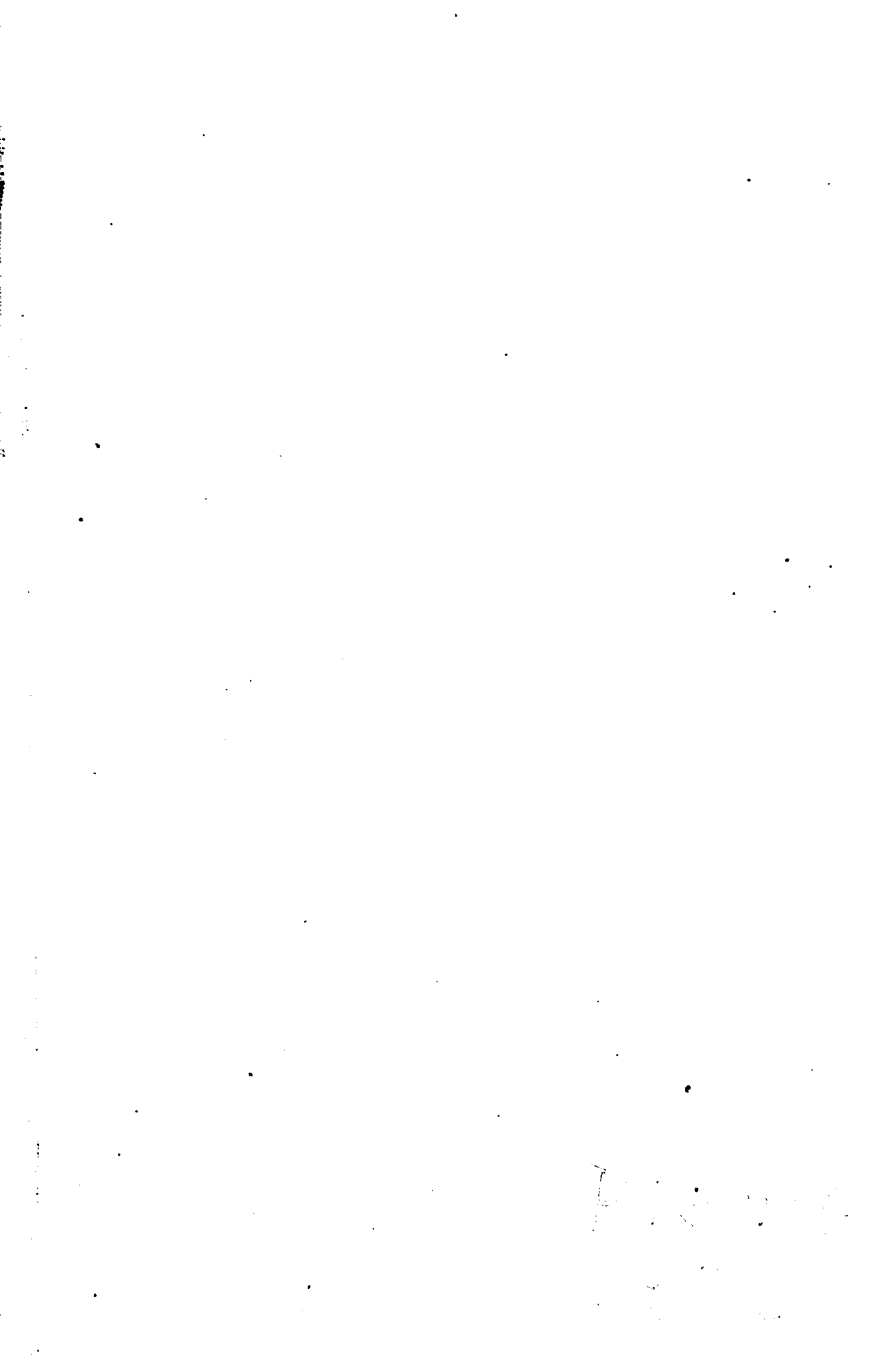
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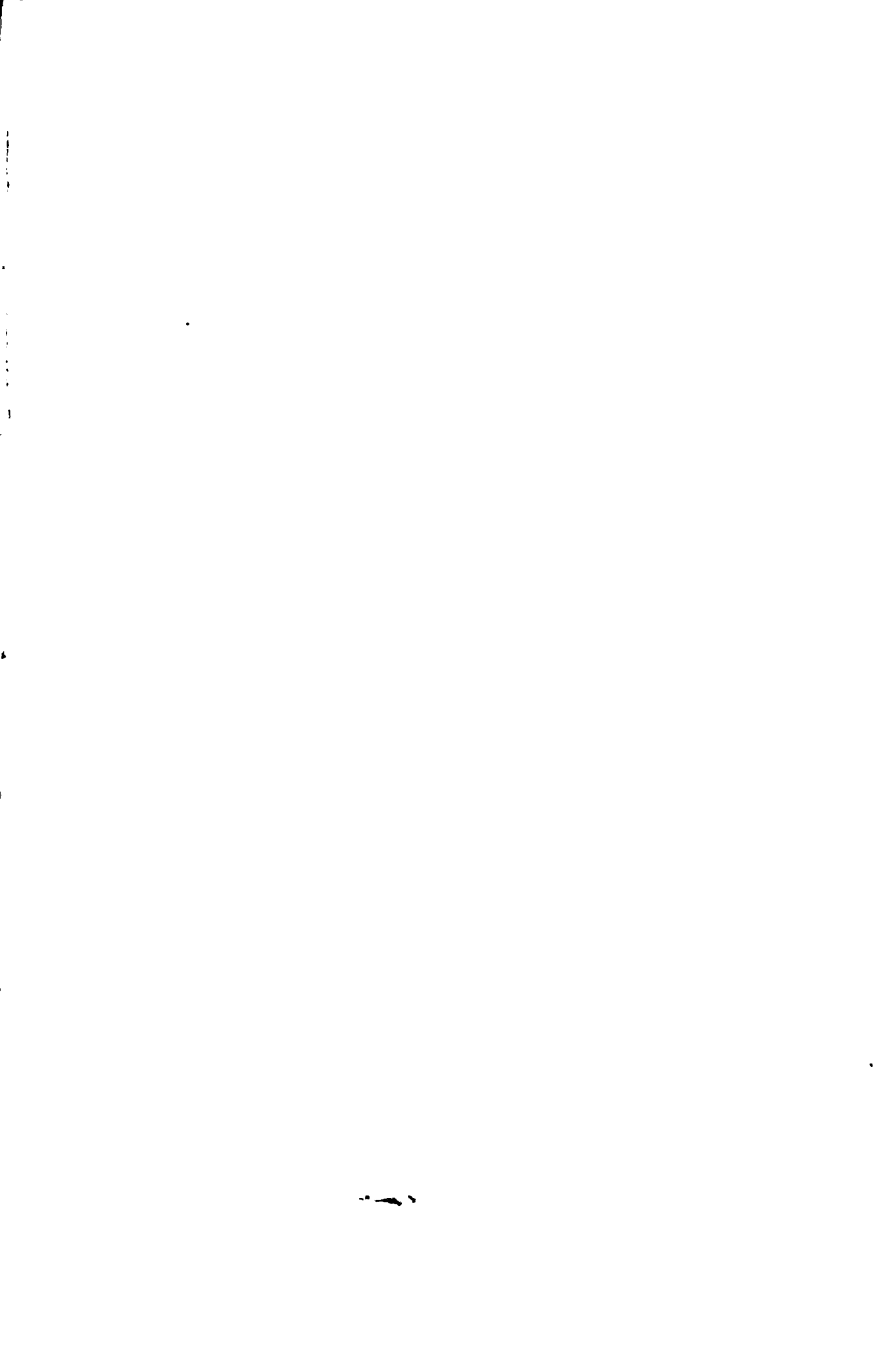


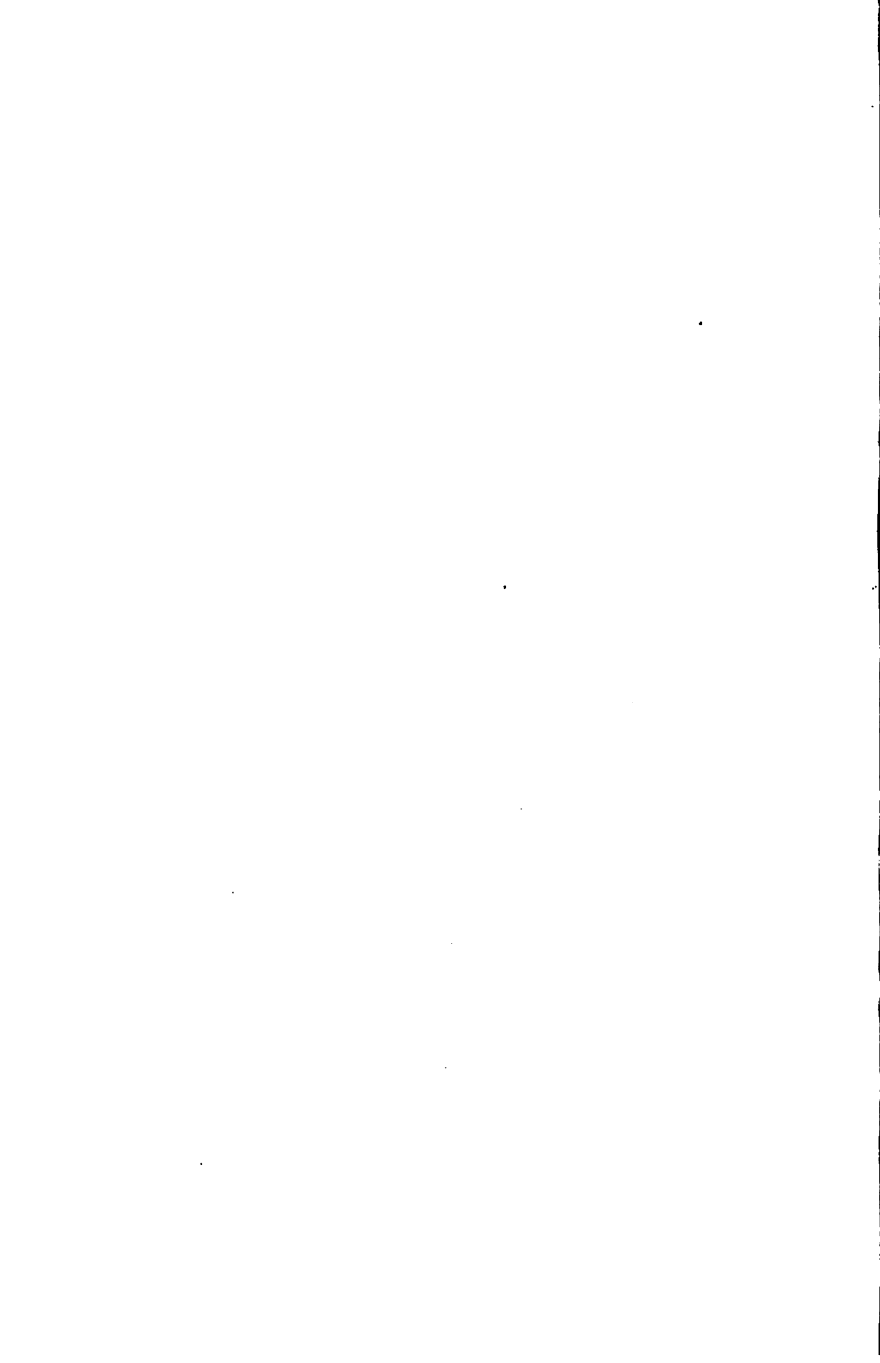
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George destroys his plane

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BOB THORPE SKY FIGHTER

IN ITALY

BY
AUSTIN BISHOP

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOHN R. NEILL



NEW YORK
HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE
1920

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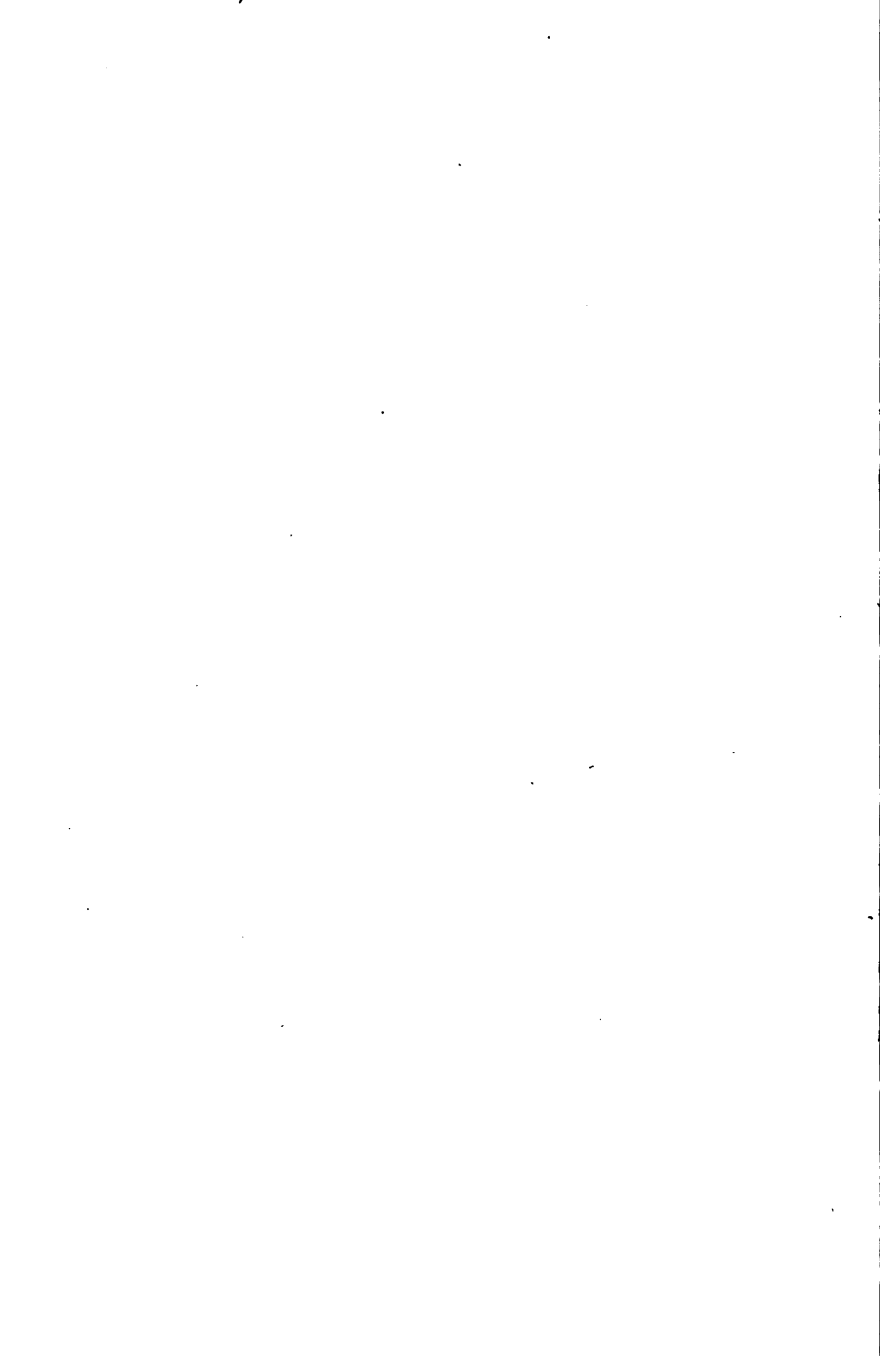
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BOB THORPE, SKY FIGHTER IN ITALY

CHAPTER I

BACK TO THE FRONT

"Oh, where do we go from here?" sang Captain Robert Thorpe, United States Air Service. It was a question that demanded an answer.

"Pull out the orders and read 'em again, Bob," suggested George Morgan. He, too, wore the uniform of captain in the Air Service.

They were standing, surrounded by their luggage, before the station at Venice, not knowing which way to turn. Behind them was the train shed from which they had just emerged, and in front of them was the canal, where a dozen gondoliers were gesticulating madly, trying to gain the two boys as fares.

Bob reached deeply into the pocket of his heavy overcoat and at last brought forth the envelope containing the official orders under which they were travelling. "Upon arrival at Venice," he

read, as though he were delivering an oration, "you will report to the Commanding Officer of the Sant Andrea Air Station for instructions." "All of which sounds very nice," said George. Neither of them had any idea of the location of the Sant Andrea Air Station, and they were doubt-



ful of their ability to speak enough Italian to get them there.

"Well, here goes," said Bob. He showed the orders to the porter who had carried their luggage, pointing out the words "Sant Andrea." The porter looked at the paper closely; then he shook his head and commenced talking rapidly in Italian. Another porter, attracted by the noise, joined them, and he talked. Several minor station offi-

cials came—and they talked. The boys strained their ears to catch familiar words in the chorus of voices, but it was hopeless. By great efforts they managed to keep their faces straight. At last, however, it became too much. A laugh that had been bubbling around in Bob's chest finally broke out, and in an instant they were all laughing.

At that moment a launch came speeding up to the landing, and a young Italian officer jumped out.

"Captain Thorpe and Captain Morgan?" he asked.

"Yes."

"My name is Maniotto," he said, putting out his hand. "Colonel Martinelli sent me over to meet you. I'm sorry to be late. Were you having some trouble?"

"No," Bob answered. "I was only trying to find out how to get to Sant Andrea."

Lieutenant Maniotti spoke to the porters in Italian, and they began jabbering. Finally he interrupted them, and said to Bob:

"They were just telling you that they couldn't read the paper you showed them."

"Was that all?" asked Bob. "I thought they were trying to tell me the history of Venice."

Maniotto had the porters take the luggage to

the launch. When it was safely aboard, the three officers entered the cabin, which was arranged with seats in the style of a limousine. The motor roared, the little launch heeled over as it curved around, and in a second they were speeding along the historic Grand Canal.

It was the first time the boys had been in Venice, and they were intensely interested. It was strange to be in a city where the streets were water, where there was not the least rumble of wagons and taxis. Of course, they had heard of Venice and seen pictures of the canals, but that was nothing compared with actually seeing it—gliding past the rows of houses that stood straight up from the water and looking down the narrow streets where gondolas slipped along.

From above them came the old, familiar song of an airplane engine. They could just catch a glimpse of the plane as it wheeled in the sun. Bob's hand closed on George's knee with a grip that made him wince. (They exchanged glances and smiled contentedly. It was good to be getting back toward the front again.

Just six weeks before, they had been stationed on the Verdun front as pilots in the French Escadrille Squad 98, and now, they were getting back to the "peace and quiet of the front." The ex-

pression was Bob's, delivered as a reflection on life in the interior, as the country behind the lines was called. Nearly two years had passed since the boys had sailed away from the United States to serve in the American Ambulance as volunteer drivers. During the months they had spent carrying wounded French soldiers, they had gazed longingly many times up into the sky where airplanes passed to and fro between the lines and the airdromes. That was what they wanted to be doing, but far-sighted parents had made them promise before leaving home that they would not enlist. Then came our declaration of war against Germany, making enlistment a duty. With the least possible loss of time they joined the French army, as members of the Lafayette Flying Corps, because it promised immediate training as pilots.

Adventures came rapidly; the fun and thrills of learning to fly; the capture and escape of Meyer, a German spy; the excitement of doing "stunts" in the air; and then, even before those things had a chance to become stale in their minds, the front. Success had come to them on their first patrol—they both said it was good luck—when they put down a boche plane. Many fights followed that first introduction to war flying, and the fact that they were the victors in the battles could be seen

from the ribbons they wore. On Bob's coat there was the ribbon of the Médaille Militaire, and the French War Cross, bearing five palms and one star; and George wore a War Cross with two palms and a star. Old campaigners who had seen longer service, counted those palms, and nodded, as though to say, "Good work!"

And now they were getting back into the game again! Back where a fellow could "spear a squarehead," if he felt so inclined. Those six weeks in the interior had seemed long.

The news that they had been awarded commissions as Captains in the American army had come to them one night at Verdun, when they had been celebrating Bob's "Hundred thousand dollar bon-fire" of German airplanes and hangars. The regret they felt at leaving the French pilots with whom they had done so much fighting was made easier by the thought that they would soon be in the uniforms of their own country. And it was a great day for them when they arrived in Paris to be sworn in for duty as captains in the United States Air Service; a great day when they had put on their new uniforms, and Sam Browne belts, and pinned their medals to khaki jackets.

Orders to go to Italy were issued to them immediately. No explanation was given. The orders

merely said Italy, and, being good soldiers, they asked no questions. There were no explanations when, in Rome, they had been ordered to a little town on the edge of a lake for training in flying-boats. They were disappointed at not being sent directly to the front, but they said nothing and flew the boats—little one-seater Macchi's. When, at last, they had flown the Macchi's in every position they would fly—and, according to the instructors, in some positions that they wouldn't fly—they were given orders to report to Venice.

They were in Venice at last—and the front only ten miles away!

“That's the Rialto bridge,” said Maniotto, as they passed under a heavy arch joining the two sides of the Grand Canal.

“‘Many a time and oft in the Rialto’” quoted George softly.

Here they were, at the very scene of Shakespeare's “Merchant of Venice.” When they had studied it in school, Venice seemed like some imaginary spot. And now they were about to fight wars from Venice!

They looked back at the bridge.

“All that old Shylock needed,” said Bob, “was a good ride in an airplane. If they'd done a couple of loops with him, he'd have forgotten all

about his ducats, and his daughter, and his pound of flesh."

"Yep, clears out the brain."

The canal suddenly became wider and they turned into the harbor of Venice. To the left they saw the great Campanile Tower rising above the buildings.

"I'm taking you to a hotel," said Maniotto. "There's no room at the station, so the Colonel has requisitioned two rooms for you. You'll be much more comfortable there, and the 'skimmer' will come for you every morning."

"Fair enough," said Bob. "When do we report?"

"I'll wait for you, if you'd like," replied Maniotto. "Or I'll send the 'skimmer' whenever you say."

"That would be better, don't you think, George? I'd like to get washed up."

"In about an hour, say?"

"Yes, that's fine."

The launch swung around in an easy curve and entered one of the little canals. Suddenly the man at the wheel reversed the propeller, and with a great thrashing of water the launch settled back in its wake, coming up gently against a row of steps over which there was a sign "Albergo

Fiume." It was the Fiume Hotel, at which the boys were to stay, so-named to show Italy's determination to gain from the Austrians the city that she claimed as her own.

[A porter came to the door and grabbed the boys as they stepped from the launch, explaining that the stairs were slippery from the constant wash of the water. He spoke a peculiar language that he fondly believed to be English. He had picked it up from the stream of tourists that had passed through the city in the better days before the war.

"See you in an hour," called Maniotto from the launch.

Upstairs the boys unpacked, talking through the open door that connected their rooms.

"Listen, George. Keep quiet."

"Listen to what?"

"Well, if you'll keep quiet you'll hear it."

In the moment of silence that followed, they heard the dull "boom" of cannon on the front.

"You know, George, I'm ashamed of myself for being glad to hear them again. Who'd have thought it?"

"You're a bloodthirsty old rascal," commented George, and then he added, "It's music to my ears."

✓ “No, I’m not bloodthirsty, but I was awfully sick of the interior. When there’s a war going on, there’s only one place to be—and that’s in the middle of it.”

“I wonder what they’re going to do with us? I was so interested in seeing Venice that I forgot to pump Manto . . . Manito . . . Maniotto . . . whatever his name is.”

“Maniotto, I think,” answered George. “Oh, I presume we’ll be flying boats around.”

“But you can’t fight with boats. I want my little ol’ Spad back again. I’m not kicking, though. Far be it from me to kick. I’m so glad to be back at the front again that I’ll fly a shingle—and I’ll bring down Heinies, too. I’ve got a lot of hate stored up, and I’m going to take it out on the first squarehead that gets himself in my way.”

“Hurray!” shouted George.

“Don’t ‘hurray’ me, young fellow. I mean it.”

“Hurray!”

“All right. How about a dinner to be given to the one who gets the first boche?”

“I’m on.”

/ Jubilantly they continued unpacking, and presently they were spluttering in bowls of water, washing off the grime of the train. Then each took his turn at brushing the other. At last they were

ready to present themselves to the Commanding Officer at Sant Andrea.

A distant roar that sounded as though it might come from the "skimmer" made them lean far out of the windows. They could see the little oblong boat, propelled by an airplane motor and a regulation airplane propeller, coming toward the hotel,



riding on top of the water as though it were trying to fly. White spray flashed out on either side of it.

Almost as soon as they were downstairs, the "skimmer" was at the door. When they were aboard, the men turned it round by jabbing their hooks into the walls of the building. Maniotto, who was performing the duties of Captain and Chief Engineer, "gave her the gun" and the boat

lunged ahead. The noise was deafening, and a fine, cold spray filled the air. The feeling of speed, as the "skimmer" hammered along on the crests of the little waves, was exhilarating. Presently the boat turned slightly to the left and ran close in toward an island, covered with buildings and large hangars. The noise of the motor subsided and the boat seemed to tire of its effort to fly; it settled down in the water and glided to the landing stage.

"Home again," said Bob, looking at the hangars.

Maniotto tossed the oilskin coat he had been wearing to one of the mechanics, and said:

"I'll take you to Colonel Martinelli now, if you'd like."

"Lead the way."

The Colonel's offices and living quarters were in a long, single-story brick building. The first room they entered appeared to be the general office of the squadron; then came a waiting room in which the Colonel's messenger was stationed. At Maniotto's direction, the messenger disappeared into the private office with the announcement of their arrival.

"Does he speak English?" asked Bob.

"No. I'll interpret for you."

"Perhaps he speaks French," suggested George.

"Yes, he does," answered Maniotto.

"That makes it easier."

During the time they were in France the boys had picked up a fair acquaintance with the language.

The door swung open and Colonel Martinelli appeared. He bowed and shook hands with them, speaking rapidly in Italian to Maniotto. The latter answered in French; "The American officers speak French, *mon colonel*."

"Ah, so much the better," said the Colonel. "Come in, gentlemen. No need of you staying, Maniotto."

"*Très bien, mon colonel*." Maniotto went out, closing the door behind him.

The boys found themselves in a large, comfortably furnished office. Large maps showing the entire front; maps showing in great detail certain sections of the front; maps showing the invaded territories; and maps showing the coastal regions of the entire Adriatic Sea were hung from the walls. Souvenirs of the war were strewn about on tables and book-cases; shells, parts of Austrian planes, an Austrian machine gun and several helmets.

"Take off your coats and sit down," said the

Colonel, waving in the general direction of several big chairs. "Ah, you are well decorated," he added after they had removed their overcoats. "I'm glad of it. It shows you are equal to the work we have at hand."

That sounded good—"the work we have at hand." The boys, not having received the least intimation of the purpose for which they had been sent to Italy, were all attention immediately.

"Yes, your work will demand courage," continued the Colonel.

"May I ask what the work is, Colonel?" said Bob.

"What, you don't know?"

"No."

"That's strange. You were given no instructions in Paris?"

"No."

"Nor in Rome?"

"Not a word."

"Surprising! Well, I must tell you about it. You'll find it interesting, and perhaps a trifle hot at times. You . . ."

The messenger knocked at the door, entered and delivered a message.

"You . . ." began the Colonel, and he was again interrupted, this time, by the telephone. When

he finished talking into the instrument, he said to the boys, "Come along into my living quarters. I'm interrupted here every twenty seconds. This business is too important."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST AUSTRIAN

"You will find war on this front considerably different," began Colonel Martinelli. "In fact, because of the peculiar duties to which you've been assigned, you'll see very little war as you knew it in France."

Both Bob and George were listening earnestly to every word. Life seemed full of possibilities.

"But first, let me give you an idea of the situation," continued the Colonel. "All along the other side of the Adriatic coast is a country that we call *Italia Irredenta*—Un-reclaimed Italy—because the people who live there are not Austrians, but Italians and Slavs, living under the tyranny of Austria. They hate the Austrians bitterly, and they are really allied with us in the war against Austria. Yet they are cut off from us, and we are unable to assist each other. You can see what the effect is."

The boys nodded.

"It has been decided to do everything possible to assist them, to encourage them in their fight

against Austria, and you two young Americans are to play a part in what is known as propaganda warfare. The work demands great ability as flyers, and great courage. The penalties of failure, and by failure I mean capture, are severe. You understand that, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Bob. George nodded.

"I had supposed," continued the Colonel, "that you knew why you had been ordered here. Generally, in work of this kind, we use volunteers. But you are willing to go through with it?"

"Of course."

"Excellent. Now to business: Within the next few days you will meet the man under whose direction you will work. In the meantime I am to see that you are supplied with planes and mechanics. You will fly with the patrols of Sant Andrea so that you will become acquainted with the front and the general outline of the coast. I want you to study certain sections of the map very carefully—especially the coast line between Pola and Trieste." He pulled from his pocket a small map upon which there were many red ink marks, and spread it out on his knees, motioning the boys to come closer. "This map is the result of three months' effort on the part of our secret service, and, even at that, it is incomplete in some respects.

Two of our best men were captured, but we had received almost all the information that we needed when the pigeons stopped coming. This is the map I want you to study. You must photograph every detail of it in your minds; you must know each one of these points by sight and by number before you can really start working. The map



isn't to leave this office.' Whenever you want to study it, you can come here and we will study it together. But first, before the map can mean much to you, you must fly over the country. Perhaps it might be a good scheme for you to go out in photographic machines and 'shoot' the district."

Neither of the boys had received training in

photography. They explained this to the Colonel, who replied; "That's easily arranged."

Following the end of Colonel Martinelli's pencil they journeyed the length of the Istrian Peninsula from the light-house at the south end to Trieste at the north. He explained what they might expect to see, what landmarks they were to look for, the positions of the various anti-aircraft batteries and the locations of enemy air-dromes.

"Don't get into a fight if you can decently avoid it," advised the Colonel. "You have other things to do. But if they attack you, remember this; the Austrian pilots are no good at manœuvering. Take your time and get them into a favorable position before you fire."

Then he took them back to the office where they stood before several large photographic maps of Pola harbor. He explained to them the purposes of the different anchorages; showed them where to look for the battle cruisers, and where the destroyers were drawn up in orderly rows awaiting a chance to slip out on patrol. Also he told them about the Italian submarines, and traced the route that each followed.

"Our submarines are on the surface each morning between ten o'clock and half past, and each

afternoon between four and half past. They come up at those times to receive radio orders. Of course, they may be on the surface any time during the day, but they show a signal so that our pilots won't bomb them. This month the signal is a white triangle displayed on the forward deck. Let your bombs loose on anything that doesn't show the signal."

When he had given them a general idea of what their work would be during the next week, he asked:

"Would you like to try a flight this afternoon?"

"Indeed we would," answered Bob.

"I'll have Maniotto take you for a swing around the front."

Maniotto appeared presently and the boys went with him to the storehouse, where they made out requisitions for flying clothes. Then to the hangars where they became acquainted with their mechanics. Two new Macchi boats were on the runways, awaiting inspection.

Swiftly the boys ran their hands over the Macchi's, feeling the wings and wires, sounding the thin bottoms to make sure they were solid and without flaws. Then they pulled on the heavy, fur-lined suits and helmets, tossing their caps to the mechanics. The engines were started. Me-

chanics straddled the cockpits and put their hands on the cylinders to feel the temperature.

"All ready?" called Maniotto.

The mechanics answered by shutting off the engines, and the pilots climbed into their seats, squirming around and settling themselves. Belts were fastened and altimeters adjusted to zero.

"All set," called Bob.

"All set," repeated George.

Maniotto's machine, resting in its cradle, lumbered awkwardly down the runway to the water. When the cradle sank, leaving the boat afloat, he twirled the starting magneto and the engine "took" with a roar. He had scarcely started when George's machine was slipped into the water, and then Bob's. Three waves of spray, one directly after the other, traveled rapidly up the canal. Finally Maniotto's machine took to the air, and with clock-like precision George and Bob followed. They rose to one thousand feet, and then turned, grouping themselves in patrol formation.

Bob stayed far enough away from the others so that he could admire Venice without being constantly on his guard against collision. Beneath him lay the criss-cross of canals, gleaming in the sun and reflecting the blue sky overhead. The Campanile, which towered above everything else

when seen from the ground, became a little square mark on the Piazza San Marco.

"What a way to see Venice!" thought Bob. He was assailed by a mad desire to go down and fly along the Grand Canal, but Maniotto was gaining altitude and he pulled the throttle open wide and followed.

/ When they had passed over the city, Maniotto turned to the left, heading for the front. The sight of the land was less pleasing. It was brown with winter, and desolate when compared with the greenish-blue of the Adriatic. Bob scarcely realized when they reached the lines, because he was expecting to see the same shell-pitted country, slashed by countless trenches, that he had grown to know so well at Verdun. The river must be the Piave, he decided. But where were the trenches? He looked straight down, searching for them. At last he found them, nicely camouflaged, running along the banks of the Piave. And where were the "archies"?

As though in answer to his question, there came a "whoof, whoof" of shells exploding near them. Bob looked around and saw two balls of smoke. He rolled his plane from side to side, and George answered.

"Home again," muttered Bob.

More shells exploded but the guns were poorly aimed. One of them exploded directly ahead of Maniotto, who drove his plane straight through the smoke as though he scorned to notice such a thing.

After they had left the lines several miles behind them, they turned up the Piave. A desultory fire of "archies" followed them, and presently they fell to chasing the balls of smoke and running through them whenever they were near enough. It was as though they were saying to the Austrian gunners, "Just keep your gun aimed as it is, old man. Perhaps I can help you out by running into the shell." But the gunners didn't seem to enter into the game at all, for their shells scattered all over the sky.

Presently Maniotto gave them a signal that they took to mean "stand by." They drew in closely to him and commenced searching the air for enemy planes.

It was not an enemy plane that had caused Maniotto to give the signal, but an enemy balloon that was ascending behind them. He turned suddenly and started down, but before they could reach the balloon, it had been hauled to the ground.

"The motto of the Austrians is 'See Austria first,' " Bob remarked ruefully.

Regardless of Colonel Martinelli's advice on

the subject of fighting, Bob was keen for action. He swept his machine around until it pointed squarely into enemy territory and fired a volley from each machine gun. The shots rattled pleasingly.

"Oh, what I need is a fight, tra-la, a fight, tra-la," he sang. In the roar of the engine his voice came back to his ears as a faint echo. "A fight, tra-la, a fight, tra-la. . . ." He stood his machine straight up and "zoomed" until he lost speed! then he let it slip to the right. When he came about in a vertical turn he discovered that George and Maniotto were directly behind him, following. Evidently they had taken his manoeuvre as a signal that he had seen an enemy plane.

"Commonly known," he remarked to himself, "as starting something you can't finish."

However, he decided that he would retain the lead and go exploring. Who could tell what might happen? And, at any event, there were always the trenches to be "shot up." Might as well be doing something as nothing, he thought.

He closed the throttle and started down, with George and Maniotto following in close formation. He searched the air below him for some signs of a boche plane, but there were none to be seen. The front was serene and peaceful.

✓ To the left, far back in the Austrian lines, he saw a large airplane, headed for the sea on a course diagonal with the trenches. He brought the patrol about sharply, staying between the enemy and the sun, and losing altitude rapidly. When they were at the approximate altitude of the Austrian, he turned again, hoping to cut him off from retreat.

The "archies" began spattering around them again, disclosing their position to the Austrian, who immediately turned and made for home. Giving up all hopes of a sudden, surprise attack, Bob opened his engine wide and put the nose of his plane slightly down to increase his speed. He still had a slight advantage in altitude, but he was more than willing to sacrifice it, if by doing so he could get into position for an attack. He glanced back and saw that Maniotto and George were close behind him.

Once Maniotto tilted his machine to the right as though asking Bob to try cutting in closer on the Boche, but Bob held his position. It was close reckoning. To follow Maniotto's plan would have been to make it a chase with scant chances of ever coming into contact with the enemy. Bob's plan was to cut off the retreat. The Austrian, Bob figured, probably had some advantage in speed,

but, once cut off, it was an advantage that he could not use. He would either have to fight, land, or use his speed in a straightaway flight across the Adriatic. There was small chance of his trying the latter in a land machine, so late in the afternoon.

Slowly the machines closed in on the point where their courses crossed—the goal for which they were racing. As they came closer and closer upon it, Bob sat bending forward, urging his Macchi to greater speed.

“I’ve got him!” he shouted.

The Austrian apparently realized at the same moment that he was trapped. The plane suddenly banked to the right and turned sharply. Bob followed, wondering what the next move would be.

CHAPTER III

BEGINNING THE BIG JOB

THE Austrian pilot had no illusions about the safety of his position, and he lost no time in acting. There was one advantage that he still retained; he was above his own territory. Down went the nose of his machine, heading for the beach, which was the only suitable landing ground within reach.

Bob followed without shutting off his motor, hoping to make it a battle. But long before he came within range, the enemy plane was rolling along on the sand. The pilot and observer were out of the machine before it stopped. They scurried off toward the sand dunes to seek protection from the shower of bullets that spattered down.

Bob, with his fingers clamped down on his triggers, sent two streams of bullets into the deserted plane. If the Austrians expected him to fire on them they were pleasantly disappointed. He pulled his machine up into flying level and passed a few feet over their heads, waving to them. George

and Maniotto, each in his turn, opened fire on the airplane, completely wrecking it.

As they started down the coast, Maniotto drew up near Bob and started to climb. Bob and George followed, thinking it best to relinquish the lead to him, since he knew the country and the



location of anti-aircraft batteries. Presently they had reason to be thankful, for one of the coastal stations commenced peppering them with unusual accuracy. They changed their course seaward and were soon out of range.

It was just dusk when they dipped down toward

Venice and landed. Maniotto was out of his machine and standing on the runway as Bob came taxi-ing up.

"Good head-work," shouted Maniotto, when Bob shut off the motor. "Did you see them run?"

Bob laughed. "That was the easiest fight I was ever in," he said. The mechanics, wading out on the runway, caught his machine as it came toward them.

"I thought he was going to get away from us," said Maniotto. "It was a pretty close one, eh?"

"Yep—almost too close." Bob made a jump for dry land. "But we get a good dinner at the expense of the Honorable Captain George Morgan, all the same."

"How's that?"

"Oh, we had an argument about putting square-heads down with a flying boat, and the one who did it first was to have a dinner given to him. You're invited, of course. Here he comes."

George taxi-ed down the canal. When his motor stopped, Bob called; "Have you decided what we'll have for dinner, George? Mighty nice of you to ask us."

"Huh—do you call that a fight? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, picking on a cripple like that."

"They could run pretty fast for cripples."

"Well, if you call that a fight, I'm going to call a cheese sandwich a dinner," replied George with a grin. As he jumped out of the boat, Bob and Maniotto each grabbed an arm and escorted him off, telling him what a good scout he was to ask them to come to such a wonderfully fine dinner. They begged him not to be too lavish—any little thing would do, and they rattled off a list of the most expensive dishes they could imagine.

In Maniotto's room they took off their flying clothes, and then went to report to Colonel Martinelli.

"Ah, and did you see the front?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied Bob. "And we came across an Austrian."

"So? And what did you do to the Austrian?"

"We put him down, sir."

"On the beach just this side of Caorli, sir," put in Maniotto.

"And didn't I tell you to leave the Austrians alone?" asked the Colonel. His eyes twinkled and a smile made the corners of his mouth twitch. The boys could see that their disobedience of orders was not being taken as a gravely serious matter. "I presume," continued the Colonel,

"that he just came up and put himself right in front of your machine guns, so that you had to shoot him or run into him."

"Well," remarked Bob, "it wasn't quite that bad. As a matter of fact, he seemed to be in a great hurry to get home."

They went over the details of the chase, and pointed out their manoeuvres on the map.

"Not bad," remarked the Colonel. "Not bad. You can probably take care of yourselves, but I think you've seen all of the front that you'll see for some time to come. Tomorrow you can begin taking pictures."

He gave Maniotto instructions to have their planes rigged with cameras for work the next morning. "Show them how to do it," he said, "but don't let them try to take pictures of home life in the Austrian trenches."

On the way to the "skimmer," quite regardless of George, Bob and Maniotto continued to talk about what they would have for dinner. They even went so far as to estimate that it wouldn't cost George more than his next month's pay.

"One cheese sandwich apiece," remarked George, apparently talking to himself.

When they reached the entrance of the Ristorante Pilsen, where they decided to eat,

Bob turned to George and said, very seriously:

"Your idle prattle about cheese sandwiches pains me, George. The point is that you can't say 'cheese sandwich' in Italian."

"Ruined!" exclaimed George. "Lead the way Maniotto, you have me in your power. Do your worst."

In the restaurant they found several hundred officers of the army and navy at dinner. Most of them seemed to know Maniotto. It was a lively place, more like an officers' club than a restaurant. Activity centered around two long tables, at one of which Maniotto found seats for them. After waving in answer to the greetings that were showered on him from all sides, Maniotto presented Bob and George to the men at the table. He ended by saying that they had put down their first boche on the Italian front three hours after arriving in the city. It was caught up and repeated from table to table, and the boys felt themselves the center of all eyes. Venice had seen few American officers, and the arrival of two who lost so little time in showing the Austrians "what was what" was a sensation.

It was a gay dinner. Jokes were shouted back and forth across the room; the latest stories of

adventures in submarines and airplanes were passed about, and when conversation lagged one of the groups struck up a song. After the first few minutes of embarrassment, when they felt every one looking at them and talking about them, the boys felt quite at home. Most of the officers near them could speak French and they were always ready to translate any scrap of conversation that was particularly amusing.

Bob sat next to a young submarine officer called Zannini, who pointed out the notable characters and explained what feats each had accomplished. There was one man that Zannini admired above all the others, and that was a tall, angular captain by the name of Camastra.

"A very daring chap," he said. "His specialty was carrying spies into the enemy country."

Bob, because he had had so much experience in that kind of work, was greatly interested.

"He doesn't do it any more?" he asked.

"That's rather difficult to say," replied Zannini. "No one seems to know just what he is doing now. Of course, he doesn't have very much to say for himself. Once he was very nearly captured—ran down into a nest of machine guns. They were waiting for him, you see, but they didn't have sense enough to wait until he landed. He managed

to get away and landed here in Venice with two bullet holes in him. I presume he's planning up something new this time. He's been in Rome for the last two weeks."

Bob looked Camastra over carefully, and he felt instinctively that he would like him. There was something about the man's face that told of his courage and fighting qualities. Bob glanced away to follow Zannini's gesture toward another man. Presently he turned toward Camastra again and their eyes met. Camastra nodded and smiled.

An idea came into Bob's head so forcibly that he was only dimly aware of Zannini's chattering. That was the man! Camastra was the one under whom they were to work. Bob turned to George and whispered his "hunch."

"Think so?" asked George.

"Stake my life on it."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know—just a plain 'hunch.' "

"Another dinner?" George was looking for revenge.

"Yep."

It was ten o'clock when they left the restaurant. They wanted to take a gondola to their hotel, regardless of Maniotto's admonitions that it would

take twice as long to ride as to walk, but there were no gondolas to be found.

They wound about through several dark, narrow, little streets. All the lights were out, because of the danger of bombardment, and several times Maniotto grabbed their arms and warned them of stairs that he knew were lurking in the black darkness ahead. Also, it was difficult to tell where the sidewalk ended and the water began.

"You're going back to the station?" asked Bob, when Maniotto had taken them to the door of the hotel.

"Yes, the last boat leaves in just a few minutes. I'll see you at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

"All right. Good-night."

"Good-night."

When they were in their room, Bob remarked: "He's a mighty nice fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes. Do you know he is a Baron?"

"No. A regular live Baron?"

"The real stuff—born that way. And very wealthy. At least, so the man who was sitting next to me said."

Bob considered the news gravely. Finally he said: "I don't know where I got my ideas on Italian noblemen, but I thought they were a busted-down crowd that kept the home fires burning by

marrying money. Maniotto certainly isn't that kind—he's a regular fellow."

Maniotto was returning the compliment in the launch that was taking five officers back to the station. "I like those Americans," he was saying. "They're pleasant chaps to be with, and they're good fighters, too."

At eight o'clock the next morning the boys heard the "skimmer" coming along the canal, but all sight of it was blotted out by the heavy fog that had settled down over the city.

"No need of going out now," said Maniotto, when they met him at the landing. "The fog won't rise for an hour yet. Sometimes it stays for days at a time."

He ordered the "skimmer" back to the station, with instructions to come for them as soon as the fog showed signs of lifting. "We'll hear it coming," he explained.

They walked up the Grand Canal together and turned into the Piazza San Marco. There, just a few yards in front of the beautiful St. Mark's Cathedral, he showed them a brass plate, fastened in the pavement. It marked the spot where an Austrian bomb had fallen. Fortunately the bomb was a "dud"—it didn't explode. They went inside the cathedral and Maniotto pointed

out the beauties of it, especially the mosaic work.

"It would have come tumbling down, all of it, if that bomb had exploded," he said, and then they heard him mutter, "The pigs! To bomb Venice!"

They felt Italy opening up to them, explaining itself, under Maniotto's guidance. With him taking them about Venice they saw another side of Italian patriotism—the deep love for the country's old glories, and the fiery desire to protect all that had come down to them from antiquity. With them it was certainly a war against vandals and huns.

"It was the huns who caused Venice to be settled," he told them. "Attila came down over this country fourteen hundred years ago, boasting that 'grass grew not where his horses trod.' The people called him the 'Scourge of God', and they built themselves a city where his horses couldn't tread. It was Venice."

His stories linked the past with the present, and made it seem less far away. To him, this war was just a continuation of the old wars that his ancestors had fought, the continuation of a glorious national adventure.

Two hours later, the fog showed signs of lifting,

and for the first time that morning it was possible to see across the canal. A few minutes later they heard the roar of the "skimmer" engine.

A patrol was just taking off when they reached the station. The boats, with their red, white and green insignia darted up from the water, and fell into group formation. From another island, which Maniotto described as the Lido, more airplanes were rising. They were land planes, and Bob looked after them longingly. There was little chance for comparison, he thought, between land planes and flying boats—the best boat was nothing better than a scow with wings, when compared with a Spad.

When the patrol was clear of the station, Maniotto had the mechanics roll the Macchi's from the hangar, and he explained the intricacies of the cameras that had been put in the machines. The camera box was mounted just ahead of the pilot and the lens looked down through a hole in the hull of the boat. A little slide that protected the camera from the water was operated by a lever in the cockpit. He cautioned them about keeping the slide closed, except when in the air.

"I spent two hours one afternoon risking my neck getting some pictures of a battery on the coast—the one that gave us a warm minute yes-

terday," he told them. "And then I forgot to close the slide. When I landed, the water came rushing in. It ruined every plate, of course, and the whole machine came within an inch of sinking. I was about the most disgusted pilot in Italy."

He took them to one of the repair rooms behind the hangars and showed them a camera that had been opened. The plates, he explained, were suspended in racks so that they fell into place automatically as the trigger was pulled. Then he had them look through the sights that were mounted on the right-hand edge of the cockpit.

"You simply balance your plane until the spot you want to photograph comes into your sights; then you pull the trigger. It's very simple. But if you want to take a series of pictures that are to be pasted up into a map, be sure that each shot overlaps the other. It's best to allow quite a little margin. Nothing is more disheartening than to come home after a hard trip and find that you've skipped over some little piece of ground. It's always sure to be a most necessary, vital spot, which means that you have to drag yourself back and try it again."

"And what shall we photograph today?" asked Bob.

"Anything you want. Why don't you try the Piazza?"

"Fair enough."

They slipped into their flying clothes and went to the hangars. When they were in their machines, waiting to be shoved into the water, Bob called out to George:

"Do you remember that fellow at home they locked up in the batty house because he had a mania for taking pictures of telephone poles? The one who boasted to the judge that he had the greatest collection of pictures of telephone poles in the world?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to collect pictures of the top of the Campanile." And then to the mechanics, "*Avanti.*"

His Macchi slid into the water, and he "gave her the gun." A minute later he was scooting up the Grand Canal, heading for the Tower. He "zoomed" up over the buildings, curved around and pulled the camera trigger when the tip of the tower flashed into his sights.

CHAPTER IV

CHECKING UP POLA HARBOR

THE pictures, when they came from the developing room, showed that both boys had fairly good command of the trick of pulling the trigger at the proper moment. Bob was especially proud of the tip-end of the Campanile, and after it had been duly certified as being of no military value, he sent it home as a souvenir.

/ In the office they went over the pictures with Colonel Martinelli showing him in each print what their objective had been. The distance of the objective from the center of the print showed the amount of error in their calculations.

“Very good,” he said. “Very good. I simply wanted you to have an idea of how it was done. Today I’m going to send you across the Adriatic on a little expedition. Maniotto is going to check up on Pola Harbor.”

“Checking up on Pola Harbor” was one of the routine duties of the station. Every day when the weather was suitable, a plane was sent over to see if any war vessels were absent from their

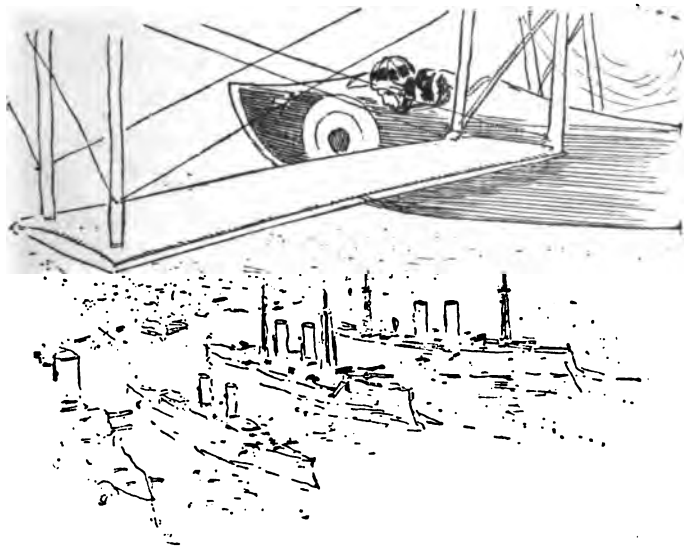
moorings, or if the smoke coming from the stacks showed that any vessel was preparing to move. The least indication of action was enough to send the Italian warships steaming out of Venice looking for trouble.

"We'll head directly for Pola," said Maniotto as they climbed into their machines, "and after I've looked the harbor over, we'll go north along the Austrian coast for a few minutes."

They climbed rapidly and soon Venice was far beneath and behind them. To their right stretched the Italian coast, and they could see the mouth of the Po River, where it divided into three streams and dumped into the sea. The peninsula looked like the paw of some immense beast.

Soon the coast was swallowed up in the mist—a gray mist that surrounded them on every side. Above them they could see the blue sky, and far beneath the green Adriatic. The waves looked like little ripples. They both admitted later that a feeling of loneliness had come over them when they realized their complete isolation from land. And they wondered just what would happen to them if motor trouble developed and they were compelled to alight in the middle of the sea. Each of them listened carefully to the song of his engine.

(Finally a slight irregularity appeared in the mist ahead of them, but it was several minutes before they realized that they had reached the enemy coast. Low rolling hills that stretched down to the water, making little bays, suddenly stood out in the dark strip before them. Maniotto



turned to the right and they discovered that they were almost over Pola.

There was the light-house, and there was the fort that Colonel Martinelli had spoken of as landmarks. Rapidly their eyes scanned the country and the harbor, picking out the points they had seen on the photographic map. They counted the

warships at anchor, and the destroyers moored side by side farther up in the harbor.

Several bursts of "archie" smoke appeared around them; white bursts, black bursts, and several that were tinged with red. Only a few came closely enough to be heard. Maniotto steered a straight course a little seaward of the city, so that he could have an unobstructed view down.

In the center of the harbor, the boys saw little flashes of white run past the ground, eight of them in all. Eight airplanes coming up to make war upon them. They turned the safety catches of their machine guns and fired short volleys to make sure that their guns were in good working order.

Maniotto turned, after crossing the city, and drove back over an inland course, checking his count of vessels once again. His work completed, he continued straight northward, leaving the eight Austrians far behind, beating the air in a pretense of frightening them away. For twenty-five minutes they followed the coastline toward Trieste, and then turned to the left to be swallowed up again in the gray mist of the sea. After another wait of half an hour—it seemed that they were standing still with the world sliding beneath them—Venice appeared.

"Good navigating," thought Bob. It was 20

mean trick, that of striking the exact point you wanted after flying across the Adriatic.

It was a pleasant day, and they were in no particular hurry, so Maniotto led them in at a good altitude over the city. They "stunted" down, each following his own inclination. Bob shut off his motor and entered a steep spiral glide, pulling it tighter and tighter until his Macchi at last rebelled. It whipped around and entered an easy spinning nose dive. Venice, the canals, the islands, and the long concrete bridge by which trains entered the city, all whirled around and became hopelessly mixed up. When he had fallen three thousand feet in that fashion, he centered his controls and brought the machine out of the spin. Six thousand feet more to go. . . . He put the machine in another spiral, and then decided that he would try landing without using his motor again—just to see if his eyes and hands had lost any of the cunning they had acquired in France.

A renversement . . . another . . . another . . .
two turns of a spiral . . . a retournement . . .
a wing-slip . . . another renversement . . .

Judging the distance to a nicety, he swept around in a steep, slow spiral that let him slip down several hundred feet; straightened out and entered a normal glide that brought him to the

water just a short distance from the runway. His speed carried him so close to the mechanics, before he lost all momentum, that they had only to reach out and grab the nose of the boat. That was fun!—the fun of flying, to come down like that.

The descent of George and Maniotto had not been quite so precipitate. They were still loitering along, taking their time about it, when Bob was out of his machine, stretching his cramped muscles.

Colonel Martinelli appeared at the door of his office and walked towards him. Bob came to attention and saluted.

“Good trip?” asked the Colonel.

“Yes, sir.”

“And how did Pola look?”

“All quiet, sir.”

They watched George’s Macchi touch the canal and send a spray of water shooting up from its sides. Maniotto’s machine circled around over the station and then slipped down in a long graceful turn.

“I’d like to see Maniotto when he lands. Will you tell him?”

“Yes, sir.”

The Colonel returned to his office, and Bob went to the runway to deliver the message; Maniotto

left immediately to obey the Colonel's summons. Presently he came out and found Bob alone—George was in the hangar.

"Would you like to go out again?" he asked. "I have to take an M3 (a Macchi, type 3,—a two passenger plane) and go hunting for one of our subs. It hasn't reported today, and they're worried about it."

"You bet I'd like to go."

Maniotto shouted some orders to the mechanics.

"How do you know where to look for it?" asked Bob, wondering if they were to go scouring the whole Adriatic.

"When a sub goes out we know exactly where it should be at every hour of the day," explained Maniotto. "For instance, I know that this sub—the S32—should be in the northeastern quarter of square H-22." He drew a little map of the Adriatic from his pocket. It was drawn into squares that were lettered and numbered. H-22 was near Pola.

"But how do you know when you're there?"

"You navigate."

The M3 rolled heavily out of the hangar, and the mechanics started the engine to warm it up.

"You see," Maniotto continued, "this work depends pretty much on your calculations before you

start. (The first thing to do is to telephone to the Meteorological Station and find out the speed and direction of the wind. You know the speed of your machine, and you can figure out what your drift will be. If the wind is blowing from the north at ten miles an hour, and you set a course due west in a machine that travels ninety miles an hour"

"You'll be ten miles off your course, to the south, when the hour is up," put in Bob.

"Surely. It's just a case of figuring up your course before you start, and allowing for any change in the wind you may notice after you're up."

George appeared from the hangar. "Where are you fellows going?" he asked.

"Hunting submarines."

He was greatly disappointed to find that he was not included in the party.

Maniotto became very busy adjusting some paraphernalia in front of the pilot's seat. There were several boxes, with wires running from them, and a large coil of cable, one end of which ran through a pulley at the side of the cockpit and into a box fastened outside.

"Radio," he explained. "All right—off we go."

They climbed into the cockpit, and were trundled into the water. A few seconds later, and they were rising above Venice.

◀ Holding the control with his left hand—it was a wheel control, rather than a stick, as in the small Macchi's—he unfastened a catch that held the coil of cable. It began to unreel, allowing a hoop of loose wires which had been packed in the box at the side to trail below the plane. Then he reached forward and threw several switches, leaning forward to read an indicator fastened to the instrument board. Bob watched him with interest; it was the first time he had seen wireless used from the air.

Maniotto commenced pounding on a key that was fastened near his seat. Bob could hear the buzzing . . . *dit, da, dit . . . dit, da, dit . . . dit, da . . . da, dit . . . dit, da, dit.*

The machine banked to the left, and Maniotto pointed down. Bob looked and saw a small ball of smoke rising. Maniotto took up a pencil that was fastened to the instrument board by a string and wrote on a pad of paper, "Receiving station says O.K." Bob nodded.

They turned out toward the sea, Maniotto watching the compass closely. The dial was swinging slightly, but after a moment it became steadier.

At last when it was motionless in the bowl, he took the pencil again and wrote, "The course we are following," and pointed to the compass. Then he pointed directly ahead of them, and wrote "Thirty-five minutes." After that, he yawned and pretended to go to sleep. Bob smiled and stretched out in the roomy cockpit, resting his head back against the seat and gazing up. It was a comfortable way to travel.

Maniotto put one elbow on the edge of the cockpit and squirmed around into a comfortable position. He seemed not to have a care in the world, but Bob noticed that his eyes kept flashing to the compass and that the dial did not vary in its pointing by so much as one sixteenth of an inch. Once Maniotto leaned far over the side of the cockpit, gazing down and studying the waves. He wrote on the pad, "No change in wind—SSW about 18 miles."

When the clock showed them that they had been out twenty-five minutes, Maniotto began to get active. He threw the switches of the wireless again, and tapped on the key. *Dit, da, dit . . . dit, da, dit.*

Then he shut the throttle and they coasted down within a thousand feet of the water. Presently they banked slightly to the left, and began to make

a large curve. Each of them studied the water intently. The curve, which had begun with a radius of perhaps two miles, began tightening slowly—in other words, they were gradually circling in on the spot where they supposed the S32 to be.

Bob was the first to see it, and at first he doubted his eyes, so indistinct was the dark hulk against the water. He touched Maniotto's arm, and pointed. Maniotto brought the machine about, reeled in the radio wire and cut the motor, gliding down toward the submarine, which was displaying her white triangle signal on the forward deck. As they approached, the men on the boat waved to them.

Bob wondered if Maniotto intended to land. The sea was choppy and looked none too inviting. Maniotto did intend to land. He brought the hull down nicely on the very crest of a small wave. Before the next wave could give them a side-slap, the boat was in the trough, wallowing about like an old duck.

Maniotto gave the engine a little throttle, and taxi-ed toward the submarine. When they were almost upon it, he cut the switch. A sailor fended off the nose and made it fast with a line, while two others stood by with boat-hooks, keeping the

wings from touching the hull. Two rope fenders were passed along, and placed as a cradle in which the nose of the airplane could rest.

Bob was so interested in the whole spectacle that he failed to notice the young officer who was directing the work. It was Zannini.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Thorpe," he called.

"Ah, bonjour, Monsieur Zannini. Comment ça va?"

Bob and Maniotto climbed from the cockpit and walked along the forward decking of the Macchi on all fours, to prevent being pitched off into the sea. The sailors grabbed them and helped them up the slippery deck.

A general conversation in French and Italian between the three officers of the submarine and Bob and Maniotto disclosed the fact that part of their electrical apparatus had become disabled. They had been unable to make their radio operate, but repairs would be made before the night was over. They had thought it better to remain out and make their own repairs, but they had not realized that it would take so long. If the pilots could return the next morning, bringing with them certain parts for one of the dynamos, it would help considerably. Maniotto promised to come back at daybreak.

As much as Bob would have liked to examine the interior of the submarine, he decided to postpone that until some other time. It was getting late. They shook hands, and climbed back aboard the Macchi. The crew shoved them off and held the plane away with their boat-hooks while Bob stood on the seat and cranked the engine. He was scarcely back in his seat when he felt the machine jump forward. It seemed to waddle up on the crest of a wave; then they were off.

CHAPTER V

POINT X

WHEN they arrived at Sant Andrea, Maniotto suggested that Bob spend the night at the station, so that they could get an early start the next morning. A vacant room in the pilots' quarters—it was the room of one of the men absent on leave—was found for him. Maniotto hurried away to report to the office, and telephone the Naval Station for the dynamo part needed by the S32.

"Well, what did you see?" asked George.

Bob told him about finding the submarine and landing alongside.

"And I've been talking with Colonel Martinelli," said George, when he had heard Bob's story. "I think we're going to get into action in a week or so."

"What makes you think that?"

"The Colonel said we would have a lot of work to do in the next week."

"What kind?"

"Photographic work tomorrow—along the Is-

trian coast. There's one point in particular that he wants us to get. It's about ten miles up the coast from Pola."

Martinelli appeared and they started for the "skimmer."

As they finished dinner in the Ristorante Pilsen, George noticed a broad smile on Bob's face.

"Tell us the joke," he suggested.

"Oh, nothing," answered Bob. "At least, nothing much. "I was just thinking that this is a funny war. Here we are—dashing young aviators. We are living at a hotel in Venice, taking our meals at the best restaurant in the city. Every morning the boat comes for us and takes us to work. And then when we finish the day's war, the boat brings us back again. Some war!"

"Eat heartily now," put in Maniotto. "You may be hungry later on."

"How's that?"

"It's been known to happen."

"Do you think it's going to happen to us?"

"It might."

"That's interesting."

"I think you'll find it so," answered Maniotto with a smile.

"Let's go," said Bob. And then, when they reached the sidewalk, he asked, "What's up,

Maniotto? Something tells me that you're keeping something from me."

"I haven't much to tell you; Colonel Martinelli says that we can get ready for some action. That's all."

"Oh, then you're in it too?"

"Yes, very much so."

"And that's why we three work together always, and stay away from the other pilots, is it?"

"Yes."

They walked along silently through the dark streets to the landing where the "skimmer" was waiting. Bob and Maniotto got aboard, and George left them to go to the hotel.

The next morning, when the first traces of dawn were in the sky, Bob heard the orderly enter the room. He sat up in bed, blinking in the electric light, and sleepily took the bowl of hot coffee the man gave him. Presently the sounds of prodigious yawns came from a room down the corridor, and Bob heard Maniotto giving the orderly a good humored scolding on the sin of being too prompt.

"When I say four o'clock, I mean at least five minutes after four," said Maniotto. "Use a little imagination about it. Or, at least, wake me up so gently that I can go back to sleep again. Don't

come banging in. You've spoiled my whole morning."

But, despite his grumbling, Maniotto was dressed and ready for work within a few minutes. When Bob entered his room, he was struggling into his flying suit, at the same time balancing his bowl of coffee.

"Hello, there," he said. "All ready? I'm just telling Pietro that the war is ruining Italy. Making us prompt, you know. As a matter of fact, it's a good thing, but I hate to admit it this early in the morning."

From the hangars they heard the hum of their motor. They passed out into the dark, cold morning, and looked up into the sky for indications of bad weather. The stars were blinking uncertainly, but the sky was clear.

/"Let's telephone first," said Maniotto, and they went to the office building. He got the Weather Bureau on the line and asked for data on the wind; then he reported to the Naval Station and told them that he was about to take-off. "Just so some fool gunner won't think we're Austrians," he explained.

It was still dark when they climbed into the cockpit of the M3, and fastened their belts.

"I'd let you handle her this morning if it wasn't

so black," said Maniotto. "There are some piles in the canal, and you have to know them pretty well."

Bob nodded. He had been hoping that Maniotto would give him the wheel, but he understood the dangers of the canal.

The white spray tossed up on either side of the boat finally subsided, and the water ceased to beat on the hull. Then they nosed up into the night. Far below them, Bob could distinguish the outline of Venice, and sometimes a canal flashed in the darkness.

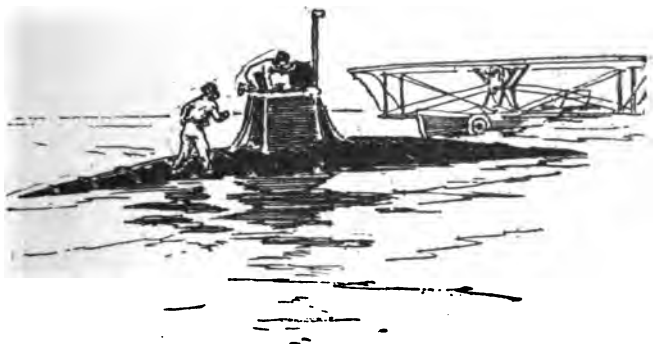
Maniotto turned on the little electric light that illuminated the indicators and compass; then he tested his radio again. There was a moment of suspense as they waited for the white signal bomb; then they were off across the Adriatic. Ahead of them the horizon was fringed with a deep orange, and above them the sky was becoming a dark blue instead of black. They were flying into the dawn, over a pool of ink.

It was scarcely light enough to see the water when Maniotto circled down to find the S32.

"Watch for signal," he wrote on the pad of paper.

An instant later they saw a green ball of fire

shoot across the water. Maniotto throttled down, and by a bit of clever piloting brought the plane to the water within a few yards of the submarine. They waited there until the crew called that they were ready to receive them. Then, with the throttle barely open, the plane crept forward and rested its nose on the rope buffers that had been put in place.



"Peach of a landing!" exclaimed Bob.

They boarded the submarine and were greeted by Zannini. Maniotto gave him the dynamo part.

"Come along below," said Zannini. "It's not so cold, but it's just as dark."

He flashed his electric torch toward the turret. "Hold on to this line as you walk along," he said. "It's slippery."

They followed him along the deck and mounted the ladder to the top of the turret. Then he dis-

appeared down the black hole into the submarine, and held a light for them so that they could get their footing on the ladder. It was cumbersome work in the heavy, fur-lined flying clothes.

"Not much room here," remarked Maniotto.

"No," laughed Zannini. He flashed his light about, and Bob saw that they were surrounded by machinery. It gleamed as the light struck it. "We'll have some light in a minute or so—just as soon as they get that dynamo working. Sit down here." He indicated two seats that were folded up against a bulwark. "We got the other dynamo working several hours ago, but we're charging the batteries now and we don't want to use up any current until we know we're all right. What's happening in Venice? Have you Americans been scaring any more Austrians down?"

As they talked, Bob could hear the crew working on the dynamo. Sometimes a ray of light would filter through the maze of machinery, making weird shadows dance. Then one of the men shouted to Zannini. He called back; the lights suddenly came on.

"Let's go back to my suite of rooms," said Zannini, and he led them aft to where the machinery was less dense. His "suite of rooms" consisted of a small bunk hinged against the hull.

On the opposite side there were two more bunks. An officer was sleeping on one of them. He rolled over as they approached.

"Dynamo is repaired, sir," said Zannini in Italian.

"Good," replied the officer, and then to Maniotto: "Thanks for bringing the part out to us. *Bonjour, Monsieur Thorpe.*"

"*Bonjour, Monsieur.*"

One of the sailors appeared with four tin cups of coffee.

"Sorry we haven't anything better to offer you," said Zannini.

They sat on the bunks and sipped the coffee slowly. It was weak and it had been made with stale water, but all of them were cold and the hot liquid felt much better than it tasted as it ran down their throats.

Bob put his hand against the hull of the boat and drew it away wet. He decided that being inside of a submarine was much like being inside of a well—and almost as comfortable. He preferred flying to prowling about under the water.

"Do you like it?" he asked Zannini.

"Oh, it's not bad. Of course, it's not the kind of a place a person would pick out for a home, but still we're not out all the time. We make up

for it when we get back to the station. It's interesting, and sometimes it's mighty exciting."

He offered to show Bob around the S32, and they left Maniotto and the Captain—it was the Captain they had found sleeping—to make a tour of inspection. Zannini explained the engines and dynamos, and then took him to the control station where he illustrated the operation of the submarine. It was light enough so that Bob could look up through the periscope, but there was nothing except an expanse of dark green water to see. Next they went to examine the torpedo tubes.

"Sometime, when we're making a test run outside of Venice, I'll take you along," offered Zannini. "Would you like to come?"

"You bet I would," replied Bob, with his usual enthusiasm.

Maniotto called to him:

"We'd better be getting along, Thorpe."

They went out on deck, and climbed aboard their plane.

"You run her back," said Maniotto. Bob took the wheel, while Maniotto stood on the seat and cranked the engine. With a wave of their hands to Zannini and the Captain, they swung about and took to the air.

Maniotto offered no suggestions or advice as to

the course they should follow, but Bob had made up his mind as to what the course should be, and he steered accordingly. Presently, far to their left, Bob saw the mouth of the Po River. They were miles south of Venice, but it was not bad for the first try.

"Wind a little stronger now," wrote Maniotto. Bob nodded.

George was already at the station when they landed, waiting anxiously for them to come so that they could leave on their photographic trip. He was disappointed when they told him that they had some "important eating to do." They refused to be argued out of it—they were hungry.

"In particular, I want you to observe this point," said Colonel Martinelli, when they reported to him. Their eyes followed his pencil along the map until it rested on a little bay several miles north of Pola. "I don't want it to appear that you have any special interest in seeing the bay, and so, just as a matter of camouflage, you must take good care to fly pretty generally over the country that surrounds it. Hereafter, we'll speak of the bay as Point X. Take pictures of it from an altitude of five hundred metres (about fifteen hundred feet), and also get pictures of this strip of land on the northern side of the bay.

After you've taken the pictures, you can run down to Pola and look at the harbor. That's all."

They went to the hangars and prepared for the patrol. Bob wanted to try his hand at navigating across the Adriatic, and suggested it to Maniotto.

"Surely," replied Maniotto. "You'll have to be doing it eventually, and you might as well start now."

Bob made his calculations of the wind and the speed of the planes, and, as leader, took-off first.

Forty-five minutes later he was pleased to see the faint outline of Pola to the right. His navigating had brought them within a few miles of Point X. He turned to the left and followed north along the coast, gradually losing altitude until the needle of the altimeter pointed to 500. George and Maniotto were at his right, spread out so that their planes covered the interior while Bob's covered the coast line.

Bob opened the camera hole and squinted into the finder. When the landmark he had chosen flashed past, he pulled the trigger, instantly noting the limits of the exposure; then, as the far limit drifted across the finder, he pulled the trigger again, and again noted the limits. Eight plates covered the entire bay, and two more were enough for the point of land to the north. He closed the

camera hole, looking around for the others. They were following.

So busy had he been taking pictures that he had scarcely noticed the land over which they were flying. Fifteen minutes later, as they passed over the bay on their return trip, he leaned out from the cockpit and searched the ground with his eyes.

On the south-eastern side of the bay there was a settlement of houses, clustered at the edge of the water. A small wharf that looked as though it might tumble down at any moment stretched out from the beach, and there were a few dilapidated sail boats at anchor. It was not a very interesting place, he decided. He could see people in the streets, staring up at the planes. Several of them waved.

The land looked rough and unfertile, as though it were covered with stones. A few clumps of trees made dark splotches here and there.

"Hardly worth fighting for, that country," he muttered. And he wondered why they had been ordered to take photographs of it.

A glance at Pola told them that no boats had stirred from their anchorage, and Bob turned to the north-west, heading for Venice. When the city appeared before them in the mist, he knew that he

was rapidly acquiring the knack of feeling his way back and forth across the Adriatic.

"You're a regular navigator, you are," said Maniotto, when they drew up at the hangars.

They hurried with their plates to the developing room, and then went to the quarters where they sat down to discuss what they had seen in enemy territory.

"I didn't see a single thing worth seeing," remarked Bob. "But I suppose we weren't sent over for the fun of it. What did you see, George?"

"Not a thing except a little town."

"A dirty little town," corrected Maniotto. "Perhaps the photographs may show us something interesting. They sometimes do, you know. That's the value of photographic observation. The plates pick up things that your eyes skip over."

He told about having been ordered to take pictures of a certain point on the other side of the lines. It was a ruined house that was apparently deserted. Each week for a month he had taken pictures, becoming more and more disgusted with the uselessness of the mission. At last, however they were rewarded by finding a small object slightly out of place. It was enough to prove that the house was not deserted. Nothing was done

about it, except to figure the range very carefully, until one night when the Italians decided to make an attack in that sector. Two well-placed shells cut the Austrians off from all communication with the rear. The deserted house had been the central telephone exchange for the sector.

“And so, you see, you never can tell just what you may discover when you go out on a photo-



graphic trip,” continued Maniotto. “I have no idea what the Colonel expected us to see, but we’ll soon find out.”

The sergeant who had charge of the developing rooms knocked at the door and entered, carrying two handfuls of wet prints. Maniotto took them and the boys went with him to the office.

“Spread them out on that sheet of glass,” said

Colonel Martinelli. They separated the prints and carefully laid them in the order in which they had been taken. It made a ragged uneven map of the country.

Colonel Martinelli leaned over the pictures and studied them until he came to one that showed a small farmhouse surrounded by a few trees and a wall. It was situated about a half-mile inland from the town. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Very interesting."

He pulled an envelope from the inside pocket of his coat, and took out a paper which he studied for a moment.

"In about three days," he continued, "one of you will be paying a call on Monsieur of the farmhouse—weather permitting, of course. I'll call for a volunteer."

"I will!" exclaimed Bob before the others could open their mouths. Maniotto and George looked crestfallen, and the Colonel smiled.

"Perhaps," he replied. "I don't see why you shouldn't. Do you think you could manage it at night?"

"Yes, sir. It wouldn't be at all difficult."

Colonel Martinelli fell to studying the pictures again. Bob grinned at George as though to say, "I beat you to it."

"Did you notice anything at the point north of the bay?" asked the Colonel.

They told him that they hadn't.

"Notice this, then," he continued. His pencil pointed to two dark spots on the water's edge. They were scarcely distinguishable from the trees and undergrowth on the bank. "Those are two trees, cut down and thrown into the water. The beach at this point is very rocky, and the trees are there to form a cradle for an airplane. You will run the boat right up on them and the branches will hold the hull off. This side of the point is uninhabited and there is small chance of your being seen as you land—even if you use an electric torch to be sure of striking the trees. I wouldn't advise it, though, and I don't think you will have any difficulty, Captain Thorpe."

"Then I am to do it?" asked Bob. There was a note of exultation in his voice.

"We'll see. I want you men to stay with me for dinner tonight. There'll be some one here whose acquaintance you'd better make as soon as possible. At seven o'clock, then."

When seven o'clock came they were in the Colonel's living room. The door opened and Captain Camastra entered.

"Do I win another dinner?" Bob whispered to George as Camastra was shaking hands with the Colonel.

"You do," replied George.

CHAPTER VI

INTO AUSTRIA

"If you are going to take me over," said Camastra to Bob as they grouped themselves around the fire after dinner, "You must try a few landings at night with the two passenger Macchi. We will use that."

"I have ordered two more M3's and they are waiting at Milan now," put in Colonel Martinelli. "Morgan and Maniotto can go to Milan tomorrow for them."

"Good," replied Camastra. "And Thorpe can stay here doing a few turns to get used to the night work. You've done some night flying, haven't you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Then it won't be anything new to you. We will leave next Wednesday night." He was silent for a moment. "I hope it works! Oh, I hope it works! It will be a great thing."

"And just what is 'It'?" asked Bob.

"Well," replied Camastra, "the whole thing is

pretty much of a secret, even to the people who will actually do the work. It never does to have too many people knowing secrets. Colonel Martinelli has told you that we are going to take part in some propaganda against the Austrians. That is why I am going over. Your work will be carrying agents back and forth. You will probably get mixed up in the business pretty thoroughly before we're through. No one can say just what will happen. You three pilots have been selected because you are equal to emergencies. If the emergencies never arise, so much the better. But something tells me that we're in for hot work."

He rubbed his hands, and his eyes gleamed. He, certainly, was equal to the game he played.

It was late when the meeting adjourned. As they went toward the landing where the "skimmer" was waiting, Camastra said, "When we meet in the city, just pretend you don't know me. You understand?"

"Yes."

"There is always the danger of spies—as Austria is about to discover."

The boys slept late the next morning. When they had finished their breakfasts, George packed his grip in preparation for taking the evening train to Milan with Maniotto. Then they went

out, and, for the first time since they had been in Venice, they went for a gondola ride.

"Some war!" exclaimed Bob.

"Terrible!" commented George.

They lolled back in the seats and enjoyed the slow rocking motion of the boat as it slipped quietly down the canal.



Neither of them could quite make up his mind to take such a war seriously. Luxury and comfort seemed out of place. They thought of war in terms of the Verdun front, where war meant a constant conflict, a perpetual struggle for supremacy. And when they thought of the men in the trenches they felt a little chagrined and humiliated.

"I'm crazy to get out and do something," remarked Bob. "This is all very interesting, this tourist's life, but it makes me feel ashamed of myself."

"Same here," replied George. "From what Camastra said, I guess it won't be long."

"I hope not."

Maniotto was waiting for them when they returned to the hotel.

"When do you think you'll be back?" Bob asked.

"Wednesday, I think," replied Maniotto. "In time to see you off, perhaps."

"So long."

"So long."

The "skimmer" came for him just as it was getting dark. He boarded it and went to Sant Andrea, where he found the M3 on the runway waiting for him.

Six times he took-off and circled over the city, and it was black dark when he made his last landing. It was work that required a quick pair of eyes and a delicate hand on the controls. He decided that it was more difficult than night flying in a land machine, because the water was deceptive in appearance. Several times when he was landing he found it necessary to correct his judgment

on the distance by a quick glance at the banks of the canal. But he rapidly accustomed himself to the new conditions.

The next night—Tuesday—he repeated the flights, and landed several times just outside the entrance to Venice harbor, where the water was choppy. He found that considerably easier than in the harbor where the water was smooth. The little waves broke up the mirror-like surface, and made it easier to judge the distance.

Wednesday morning he went to the station for instructions.

“Eleven o’clock tonight,” said the Colonel.

“Yes, sir.”

In the hangar he went carefully over his plane, sounding the wings and wires. They pulled it out on the runway and gave the engine a short test. There was a slight unevenness in the beat of the exhaust, and a new spark plug remedied that.

At eleven o’clock he reported at the Colonel’s office. Camastra and the Colonel were there, bending over some maps.

“Good evening, Thorpe,” said Camastra. “The Colonel tells me you have night landings down in good shape.”

“They went smoothly enough,” replied Bob.

“While Camastra is going over the route with

you, I'll be getting the wind," said Colonel Martinelli. He left the room.

"We will land at this spot," said Camastra, pointing to the location of the trees that had been arranged as a cradle for the boat. "I think you'll be able to get to shore without using a light. The trees are exactly fifty-six metres from the end of the point, according to my reckoning. They will probably show up plainly when we get near them. By the way, we must have a boat-hook. We can take one from the 'skimmer.' And I have some rope for mooring the boat. Once we get ashore we will go up along this little ridge, and circle the town. There is a fence here and here." He pointed to two red marks. "And a ditch here. It's well to keep those things in mind. We may have to make a get-away. At this point is a farmhouse where there *used to be* a dog who had a very loud bark. The dog died a few weeks ago." Camastra smiled, and it was a smile that had meaning behind it. "He was an Austrian dog."

"How about those trees?" asked Bob. "Do you know which way the tops of them point? If the tops run out into the water it means that the boat slides into the ends of the branches, and there is some chance of a stiff branch puncturing the hull."

"No, I told them to put the tops of the trees inshore. I thought of that happening."

"You told them?" asked Bob.

"Yes, I was over there for nearly a month. You are the only one here who knows that; even Colonel Martinelli doesn't know. There were three of us in Austria, working together, and the other two were caught."

"And shot?"

"Yes. Fortunately they weren't caught near where we are going to operate. That would have spoiled all our plans, because suspicion would have been concentrated there. As it is, the Austrian Secret Service is patiently holding the sack in another part of Istria."

"'Holding the sack'—that's an American expression," replied Bob inquiringly.

"Yes. I went to college in America. . . . But to get back to business. We will follow the route I've outlined up to this fence. At this gate there will be a signal—an old tin can. If it's up straight, the coast is clear, and if it's on its side, there's danger. Nothing elaborate, but it works. It's easy for them to arrange, you see. All they have to do is swing the gate a little too wide open if any one suspicious comes to the house. However, if the can is in the proper position, we'll pull the

bell cord three times slowly, and then three times rapidly."

Colonel Martinelli re-entered the room. "Here's the wind," he said, holding out a slip of paper. Bob took it and read the wind's strength and direction. Then he plotted his course on the map. "The Bureau says that the wind will hold the same direction through the night," added the Colonel, "but it will increase slightly."

"And, by the way, Thorpe, you can trust these people at the farmhouse with your life," put in Camastra.

Bob nodded.

Once again they bent over the map and rehearsed the night's operations. Bob covered the map, and drew several from memory, just to be sure that he had every detail photographed in his mind.

/ When they were ready to leave, Camastra went into the Colonel's bedroom to change his clothes. Presently he returned, wearing a dirty, frayed suit, such as a peasant might have.

"No need of your changing, Thorpe," he said. "You will be coming right back. And if you were caught over there, it would be better for you to be in uniform. They couldn't shoot you as a spy then."

"And how long are you planning to stay?"

"That depends. When we get there, I'll let you know when to come for me. Are you all ready? By the bye, Colonel, I want to take one of your boat-hooks."

"Take anything you want."

They pulled on flying clothes, and cleaned their goggles.

It was after midnight when they left the office to go to the hangars. Camastra stopped at one of the launches and rummaged about until he found a hook, which he fastened with cord to the lower plane.

The hangars were deserted of mechanics, except for the two who had been detailed to the duty of attending the M3. They started the engine, and Bob climbed up and kept his hand on the cylinders, ready to give the word whenever they were warm enough.

"Let's go," he said at last.

He slid down into his seat and stopped the engine, glancing at the dials to be sure that the pressure was right. Camastra climbed in, and a mechanic handed him two small boxes.

"Soap and pigeons," he remarked.

"Soap?"

"Yes, for the people we're going to see."

Bob chuckled. "But why soap?"

"Well, that's what they wanted. It's scarce stuff over there."

"Funniest war I was ever in," laughed Bob. "All right?"

"Let her slip."

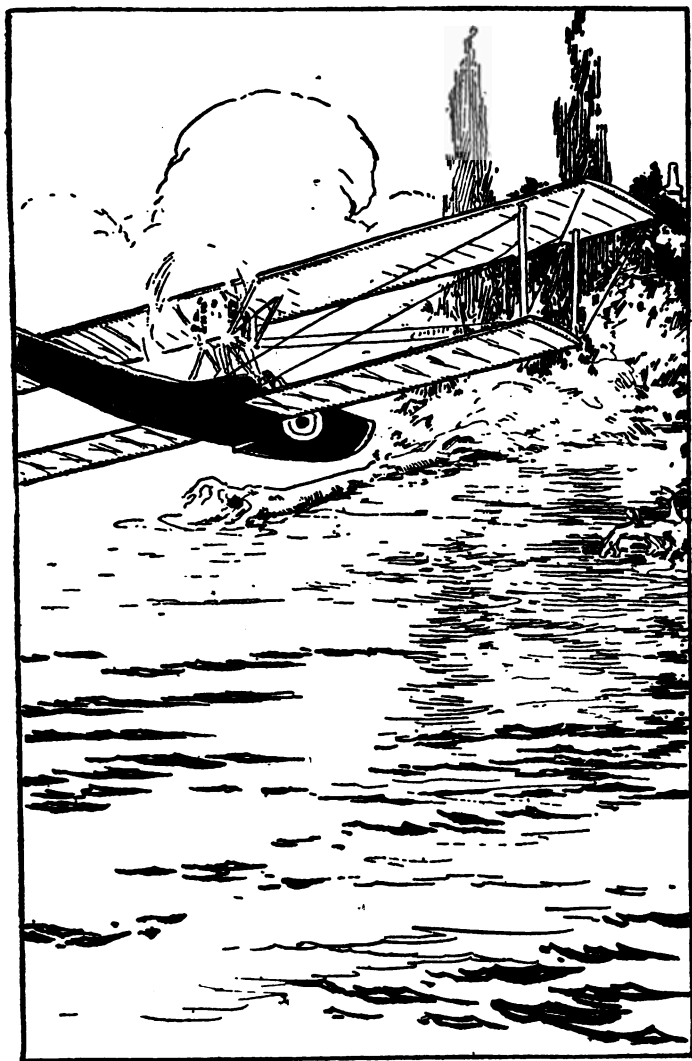
They leaned out and shook hands with the Colonel.

"Avanti."

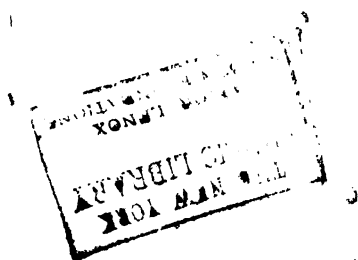
They were trundled down into the black water, and Bob felt the carriage sink beneath them. He twisted the handle of the starting magneto, and as the motor answered he gave the rudder bar a kick to swing the plane about into the wind. A few seconds later they were skipping along on the little ripples, and then the boat nosed up into the night.

Overhead the stars twinkled softly, and a small slice of moon shone in the sky. Bob settled down in his seat, turned on the light so that he could see the compass dial, and headed for Austria.

When, figuring by his clock, he knew that the enemy coast was within five miles, he throttled down slightly and entered a long glide. He kept enough altitude, however, so that when the coast came within sight—and his motor within hearing—he could close the throttle and make a silent approach.



Landing at Point X



Each of them strained his eyes, looking ahead for the faint irregularity in the darkness that would mean they were nearing land.

Bob wondered anxiously if his navigation had been good; if it would take them directly to Point X, or if they would have to endanger their plan by hunting up and down the coast. Every muscle in his body was tense as he sat there peering down.

A thin mist that was rising from the land helped them to distinguish the coastline. For a moment they were in doubt as to their location; then Camastra nudged him and pointed slightly to the left. Bob looked and saw the point for which they had been aiming. A feeling of immense relief came over him, and as he swung the plane sharply to the left so that they paralleled the coast, he realized that he was drawing great breaths of air. It seemed minutes since he had breathed at all.

With the motor throbbing softly they sank down until they were directly off the point where they wished to land. Bob closed the throttle, put the nose down and made a wide turn. As they headed around he saw that he had cut the turn a trifle short for safety, and so he manœvered to lose altitude. The barest suggestion of a figure S brought them into position.

As the water came nearer, he pulled the machine

into flying level and held it there, drawing back gently on the wheel as it lost speed. The boat jumped slightly as the hull touched the top of a small wave; then it settled down into the water, and a silvery spray shot up from either side.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Camastra. He was already standing in his seat, yanking the boat-hook loose so that he could fend off if they failed to strike the proper spot. He touched Bob on the shoulder and pointed to the seat. Bob saw the gleam of an automatic pistol, lying there waiting for him to pick up in case they met with interference in landing. Camastra climbed out on the decking of the boat with the hook.

Fifty-six metres from the end of the point. Bob measured the distance with his eyes and opened the throttle to give them some forward speed.

"I see it," whispered Camastra. "A little more to the left." Bob pushed the rudder bar over. "There! Hold it! Good! A little right! Now! Hold it!"

Bob made out the trees and held the boat on its mark. As they came upon it, he closed the throttle and they drifted in. The hull ran between the two trees and stopped. Camastra jumped overboard and splashed about in the water, drawing the boat after him. Bob picked up the automatic and

strained his eyes and ears for the least indication of an ambush.

With the rope he had thrown over his shoulders, Camastra made the boat fast to a tree. Bob cut the motor.

✓ “All right,” said Camastra. Bob passed the automatic to him, and then the two boxes. He jumped out.

Camastra was stripping off his flying clothes. He made them into a ball and tossed it into the cockpit.

“You’d better leave yours here on shore so that you can get into them quickly,” said Camastra. “Watch out for mine when you take-off—get tangled up in the controls.”

“Yep.”

“I’m leaving the hook against the nose of the boat. All ready?”

“Yes. Lead the way.”

Camastra carried the precious box of soap, and Bob had the pigeons. For nearly five minutes they walked along without speaking. It was rough country and all their attention was required to keep from stumbling over the rocks.

“Fence here,” warned Camastra. They climbed over it, and again trudged along. “Fence again, and a ditch twenty metres farther on.” Again

they climbed. After they had jumped the ditch, Camastra squatted down and drew Bob beside him. "Do you get the lay of the land?" he asked. "Those highest trees back there are on the very tip end of the point. Steer between the trees and that farmhouse. That's where the late lamented Austrian dog used to bark."



Bob could not see the town but he knew that they were about abreast of it. That made the farmhouse to which they were going slightly to their right. He turned again as they walked along, just to be sure that he had the country well in mind.

As Bob had expected, Camastra laid his course a little to the right. They crossed a road and struck a trail through a grove of pine trees.

“That road,” explained Camastra, “leads to the house, but this trail is more convenient. Blamed rough, though, isn’t it?”

At last they came to the edge of the grove. Bob could see the farmhouse ahead. They paused for a moment, and Camastra warily glanced about them and listened. Then he went forward.

At the gate leading through the wall surrounding the farmyard they found the tin can standing upright. “All right,” whispered Camastra. He reached up for the bell wire, and Bob heard the bell jangling faintly—three slow, and three fast.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT AT BIANCA'S HOUSE

THERE came the sound of footsteps along the stone flagging between the house and the gate; then a bolt was drawn and the gate swung open, toppling over the tin can. The clatter sounded like thunder in Bob's ears.

"Camastra."

"Ah, welcome," replied the man in Italian.

They entered the farmyard. The man stepped out, and Bob heard him re-arranging the tin can. When he returned and bolted the gate, they followed him into the house.

"His name is Bianca," Camastra whispered.

When the door had closed behind them, Bob glanced about the big room that covered the entire lower floor of the house. At one end there was an alcove, with benches attached to the three walls. In the center of the alcove was a brick fire box, standing up about three feet from the floor. An open fire was smoldering in it, filling the room with a dull red glow. The walls were stained black by the smoke that failed to find its way out

through the flue. At the other end of the room were stairs leading to the floor above. There was a long table in the center bearing the remnants of a meal.

Camastra and Bianca talked in Italian that was



too rapid for Bob to understand. Apparently the conversion was about him, for Bianca glanced at him several times. At last Camastra said:

“I was telling Bianca who you are. He wants me to welcome you to his house, and he says that he feels highly honored to have an American here.”

"Tell him," replied Bob, casting about in his mind for some expression of sentiment that would appeal to the latin nature of Bianca. "Tell him that I am honored to be here, serving the cause of Italy and *Italia Irredenta*."

Bianca's face illuminated as Camastra translated. He put his hand on Bob's arm and drew him toward the alcove.

They sat on one of the benches, and for several minutes Bianca talked without interruption. Camastra listened intently, sometimes nodding his head. Bob could understand very little of what was said, and he fell to studying Bianca's face in the dim light of the fire. He was an elderly man, with white hair and a white mustache that gave his brown face a ferocious expression. Sharp eyes glinted as he talked, and wrinkles in his face made strange shadows. His hands were constantly in motion. Sometimes, when he came to a particularly thrilling point in his narrative, he would stretch his arms above his head, hands clenching and opening, and his eyes would include Bob in the conversation as though asking him to bear witness to the truth of what he was saying. Bob would nod knowingly, as though he understood and agreed, and the fierce expression of Bianca's face would disappear magically. Now

and then Bianca paused to light his pipe from a taper that he stuck in the coals, but after a few puffs the pipe was forgotten. Finally he made a remark that Bob took as a reflection on the quality of the tobacco.

"Slide that package along, Thorpe," said Camastra.

He presented the package to Bianca, whose face became instantly radiant. In the excitement of opening it his fingers fumbled with the cord several times, because he would insist on gesticulating. At last, despairing of untying the knot, his fingers tightened around the heavy cord and snapped it. Bob could see great lumps of muscles on the backs of his hands, and he decided that Bianca would be a rough customer in a fight.

"Gee, he's strong!" exclaimed Bob.

Camastra translated, and Bianca's face shone. He forgot the package. With a quick movement he reached forward and grasped the top corner brick of the fire box. Again the muscles rose. The brick ripped away from the mortar that held it!

"Whow!" gasped Bob, as Bianca held the brick up. "I'd hate to have him get his fists on me. He could mess up a whole football team. How old is he?"

"Only sixty-two," replied Camastra. "Isn't he a bull, though?"

Bianca's attention had switched back to the box again. He was discovering cakes of soap, cans of tobacco, and a package of sugar. His excitement knew no bounds, but it finally subsided in the contentment of having a pipe filled with real tobacco. He leaned back and puffed out great clouds of smoke that shone like silver for a moment before they drifted up into darkness.

"Are your legs wet?" asked Camastra.

"Yes, sopping," replied Bob.

"Let's take off some clothes and dry them. No need of risking colds. We need our health in our business."

They stripped off their breeches, and Bianca tossed them on a wire that ran over the fire. He picked up the box of pigeons and talked to them through the grating. They began cooing and fluttering their wings. Still talking to them, he took the box and mounted the stairs.

Bob and Camastra, half undressed, sat down again and warmed their feet against the bricks of the fire box.

"What a character!" said Bob.

"Isn't he?"

"Where did you find him?"

"Oh, I've grown up with Bianca. He was my idol when I was a kid. I was born in Pola—my father was consul there—and I've known him ever since I can remember. He taught me to swim right off the point where we landed tonight."

"And that's how you happen to know this country so well, is it?"

"Yes. It's more my home than any place else in the world."

Bianca came down the stairs and went out of the house.

"He tells me that everything has been quiet around here," continued Camastra. "The Austrians have been treating them pretty well—trying to fight the pro-Italian sentiment, you see. The reports have been arriving regularly, but he hasn't had any pigeons."

"The reports?" asked Bob.

"Yes, from our agents. You'll take some reports back with you tonight. He's out getting them now. It's half past two. You'll have to be leaving soon."

"And you? How long are you going to stay here?"

"I'm not sure. You had better come back for me Saturday night. Bring either Maniotto or

Morgan along with you. I want them to learn the location of the landing place, and the route here to the farm. If I have to go back, one of you can stay here with Bianca. If I'm away—it may not be possible for me to get here—Bianca will meet you at the landing and tell you. In that case, return immediately.”

“I understand.”

“And bring us another box of pigeons.”

Bianca entered and came toward them. He held an envelope, which he gave to Camastra.

“Give this to Colonel Martinelli just as soon as you land,” said Camastra.

Bob pulled on his breeches and forced his feet into his wet shoes again. When he was ready to go, he found that Bianca was preparing to accompany him.

“Tell him not to come with me,” said Bob. “I can find my way back.”

Camastra translated, and then replied:

“He says that he wouldn't think of it. Let him go with you. His feelings might be hurt. He thinks it would not be hospitable of him to let you go alone.”

Bob shook Camastra's hand and left the farmhouse with Bianca. Presently they arrived at the spot where the M3 was resting in her cradle

of boughs. Before putting on his flying clothes, Bob climbed into the cockpit and felt the bottom of the hull for an indication of water that might come from a leak. There was some danger of the hull grinding against a rock, and he was relieved when he found that no water had entered. Then he arranged the cords so that he would lose no time in lashing the boat-hook, once he was clear of the shore.

As Colonel Martinelli had predicted, the wind was stronger, but it was blowing seaward, which meant that the sound of his motor would be carried away from the shore. He pulled on his flying clothes, and climbed back on the machine to start the engine. It "took" immediately, and the noise sounded like machine gun fire to him. He had never before realized quite how much noise one engine could make. While waiting for it to become warm enough for flying, he adjusted his clothes and stowed Camastra's suit where it would not foul the controls. Bianca waited patiently on the bank, taking in every detail.

When the engine was warm, he climbed out on the decking with the hook. There was small need for it, however. Bianca lifted the nose of the boat and slid it out gently; then, following it until he was up to his waist in water, he gave a

prodigious shove that sent the Macchi away from the shore.

Bob scrambled back to the cockpit.

"*Arrivederci*—"Till the next time," called Bianca.

"*Arrivederci*," answered Bob. He opened the throttle and jammed the rudder over until the boat came up into the wind. A few seconds later he was headed for Venice.

It was a long tiresome ride, sitting there with the motor droning and wind blowing past, and several times Bob had to shake off the sleepiness that came upon him. It required effort to remain awake. Presently he began to sing—that always helped in the air, when flying became tedious.

He was relieved, having repeated at least twice all the songs he knew, when he distinguished Venice beneath him. He put the plane in a steep glide, occasionally opening the throttle to keep the engine warm, and entered the canal. A lantern, swinging in the darkness, told him the location of the runway.

It seemed unbelievable, a minute later, when he climbed out of the machine and stretched his cramped muscles, that he had spent the night in enemy country.

He went immediately to the Colonel's quarters. The guard, posted at the door, challenged him, and flashed a light in his face; then he motioned him in. The Colonel had fallen asleep on the couch waiting for him to arrive. Bob woke him and handed him the envelope.

"Did you have a good trip?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir."

"Everything quiet?"

"Perfectly."

"And when are you to go back?"

"Saturday night."

"Good." He called to the guard and ordered that the launch crew stand by. "I want you to go to headquarters with me," he added.

CHAPTER VIII

BOB STAYS IN AUSTRIA

THE little launch in which they rode poked its way through the darkness in the direction of headquarters. Presently they were challenged by a sentry; the launch came up by a landing, and they climbed out.

After some delay, they were received by an officer whose name Bob could not catch. He took the reports Bob had brought from Bianca, and glanced at them eagerly. After a few sentences in rapid Italian, he bade them good-night.

"I'll drop you off at your hotel," said the Colonel, when they were back in the launch. "You are to make another trip tomorrow—or, rather, today." It was after four o'clock in the morning.

"It is possible," continued the Colonel, "that we may have you make two trips. The first to carry another agent, and the second to take Maniotto over and show him about the landing. Maniotto and Morgan will be back today, I presume, and we will have to begin training Morgan in night flying."

The launch curved about, and brought up before the hotel.

In the few seconds that elapsed between the time when Bob went to bed and when he fell asleep, he experienced a great feeling of contentment at being back in the thick of the action once again. The long, tedious period of inactivity had ended, and now he was in the middle of the war.

It was after three o'clock in the afternoon when he became conscious of some one moving about in the room. It was George.

"Hello, fellow," he said, sitting up in bed. "When did you get back?"

"Just a few minutes ago. Tell me about it. How did it go?"

"Splendidly," answered Bob. "Ring for my breakfast, will you?"

"Oh, bother the breakfast. Tell me about your trip." He pushed the button, and then sat on the edge of Bob's bed. "Cut loose—spin the yarn."

Bob went over all the details of his flight with Camastra, and his visit to Point X, and ended by repeating the instructions given him early in the morning by the Colonel.

"Great!" exclaimed George. "And when do I start night flying?"

"Tonight, I suppose. I'll get into my clothes and we'll go over to Sant Andrea. Maniotto came back with you, didn't he?"

"Yes, he's at the station."

While he was dressing, Bob took a few bites of breakfast, and presently the boys were at the landing, waiting for the launch. But before the launch arrived on its hourly trip, they heard the "skimmer." It was Maniotto coming for them.

"I thought you'd be about ready to go," he said, as they jumped aboard. "The Colonel wants to see you."

"I want Captain Morgan to start work on the M3," said the Colonel, when they reported, "and there are some things I want to show Captain Thorpe about the map."

With the Colonel, Bob pored over the maps—big maps and little maps—until it was time for dinner.

"Be back here at ten o'clock," said the Colonel to Bob, as they left. "You will take-off at about ten-thirty."

When ten o'clock came, Bob was in his flying clothes, waiting in the Colonel's office. The Colonel came in. "Just land, and let the agent hop out," he said. "He knows the way. Then return here. Maniotto will be waiting for you."

You can take him up to Bianca's house, but don't stay longer than a few minutes." He turned to the telephone, and called for the Naval Station. After reporting that a plane was about to leave from Sant Andrea, he inquired the windage.

"Eighteen, south-west," he said to Bob.

George and Maniotto came in.

"Oh, George," said Bob. "Here's something that you'd better learn."

"What's that?"

"About figuring your course." With a ruler and pencil he plotted out the course on a map.

"All ready, Captain Thorpe," said the Colonel. "Your man is coming."

He led the way out of the office and to the hangar, where Bob's machine was waiting on the runway. The engine was turning over with a soft, even beat.

They heard a launch come up by the landing, and presently two men walked over to the hangar. The Colonel met them. There was a short conversation; then one of the men climbed into the Macchi and took the passenger's seat.

"All right?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir."

The machine slipped into the water, and then rose into the air.

Bob's figuring had been good, and the course he followed brought them directly to Point X. He shut off the motor and circling down, found the cradle of trees easily.

The passenger jumped off without a word, and shoved the Macchi out until it was clear of the land. Bob pulled open the throttle once again, and steered back for Venice.

Maniotto was waiting for him when he landed at Sant Andrea.

"How was it?"

"Easiest thing in the world."

"Do you want to rest before you go back again?"

"No. I'm ready just as soon as they fill the tanks."

The mechanics took charge of the machine, and Bob went with Maniotto to the office.

"Everything go all right?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," answered Bob. "We'll leave on the second trip just as soon as the machine is ready."

"That's good. By the way, Maniotto, I have made an appointment for you at headquarters at ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

"I thought I'd tell you now, in case I shouldn't

see you tonight when you come in. Report to the General's aid."

"Yes, sir."

A few minutes later they returned to the hangars and found the machine ready for them. Soon they were rising over Venice.

At Point X, the Macchi had just landed gently on the water when Maniotto exclaimed:

"Look! What's that?"

Bob looked toward the spot on the shore where he knew the trees were located. He saw a light flashing—three long flashes, followed immediately by three short.

"That's the signal for Bianca's house," whispered Bob. "Camastra didn't say anything about using it here. Have you a gun with you?"

"Yes."

"So have I. Get it out, and we will try the landing. Crouch down low."

He open the throttle slightly and the Macchi taxi-ed ahead.

"Get up on your seat, ready to jump overboard and swing me around if we have to clear out," whispered Bob. "And hang on tight."

Again came the flashes.

As they came near the trees they heard a splash and then saw some one swimming toward them.

"Challenge him," said Bob. Maniotto did so, and the answer came back, "Bianca." Presently a hand came out of the water and grasped the side of the boat. Bianca pulled himself up.

"It's all right for you to land," he said. "I came out because I didn't want to call to you. We're having some trouble. Camastra hasn't returned, and I'm afraid he's arrested!"



Bob steered the boat between the trees and shut off the engine. They climbed out on shore.

"You must start back immediately, but you have to take some one with you."

"That means that one of us must stay," said Maniotto. "The boat won't hold more than two." He translated what Bianca had said.

"I'll stay," said Bob. "You can come back for me later."

"Not a chance," said Maniotto. "There's no sense in doing that. You can't speak Italian, for one thing."

"That won't make any difference," replied Bob. "I'll get along all right enough."

"No, Thorpe, I really don't think you'd better. If anything should happen, you wouldn't be able to talk with Bianca. One little fumble might spoil the whole game, you know."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," replied Bob. "Well, you stay, and I'll come right back for you just as soon as I can get another load of gasoline."

Maniotto spoke to Bianca in Italian, telling him their plans. Bianca interrupted.

"He says we'd better not plan another trip to-night," Maniotto interpreted. "There's too much danger."

"But you have an appointment at headquarters," said Bob.

"Yes—so I have. Well. . . ."

"I'll have to stay," said Bob. "That's the only way out."

"Yes, I guess you're right."

With a warning to them to remain close to the

machine, Bianca started into the woods. Soon they heard him returning, guiding another person. Bob took off his flying clothes and gave them to the passenger; they swung the machine around, and the Macchi glided off into the night.

For a moment they stood watching, then Bianca touched him on the arm, and they started for the house.

Bianca motioned to him to stand in the shadow of the trees growing near the gate, while he inspected the house. Presently he returned, adjusted the signal, and they entered the big room where Bob had spent part of the previous night. From beneath one of the benches Bianca pulled a bundle of clothes, and motioned to Bob to follow him. They ascended the stairs, Bianca lighting the way with a candle.

Conversation between them was difficult, but what Bob lacked in vocabulary, they made up in gestures. Bare words served as sentences, and Bob found Bianca's pantomime as amusing as a show. When Bianca sputtered Italian, and then went through the motions of undressing and dressing again, pointing to the bundle, Bob removed his uniform and put on a suit of coarse, rather dirty civilian clothes. Bianca made it clear that this was to be Bob's room, and that he was to sleep

in the little bed in the corner. As they were going downstairs, it dawned on Bob that the act of changing from his uniform had put him in the status of a spy. Before, he had been simply a soldier acting in the service of his country, to be held a mere prisoner of war if captured; but now he was as much a spy as any agent in an enemy country. It was thrilling and exciting, but he was not sure that he liked it.

Bianca stirred up the fire, and from a cupboard brought forth some corn. Bob sat on one of the benches, watching him prepare their midnight supper. It was simple fare; mush made of the coarse meal, and hard, black war bread.

They were just starting to eat when the bell rang. Bianca seized the bowl from Bob's hands. Three long, and three short. It was probably one of their agents, but Bianca was taking no chances. He hid the bowl in the cupboard, and motioned Bob up the stairs.

As he felt his way through the darkness in the direction of his room, Bob heard Bianca draw the bars away from the door, and go out into the yard. Presently, he returned, talking with another man; he called to Bob to come down. They met him at the foot of the stairs.

"My name is Penetti," said the new arrival,

in French. "You brought me over earlier this evening, you know."

"Oh, it was you I brought on the other trip, eh?" replied Bob. "I didn't know. It was so dark that I didn't get a good look at you."

Bianca barred the door again.

"Bianca tells me that the other pilot is coming back for you tomorrow night."

"Yes."

Penetti took the bowl of mush that Bianca offered him.

"I'm half starved," he said with a laugh. "Too bad to eat up Bianca's store of food." When he finished the mush, he leaned back against the wall and remained silent for several minutes.

"How many pigeons have you left?" he asked Bianca at last.

"One."

"I think we'll have to use it to tell them not to come back for you," Penetti remarked to Bob. "It isn't safe. Too much trouble has been stirred up around here lately, and the Austrian agents are running wild all over Istria. Camastra was supposed to report back here today, and I'm afraid he has been arrested. You don't object to staying, do you? It's really safer than trying to make a get-away tomorrow."

"I'll do whatever you think best," replied Bob.

"Good!" He directed Bianca to give him one of the strips of paper for sending a pigeon message. "By the way, have you a number?"

"What do you mean?" asked Bob.

"The agents are all known at headquarters by a number. In that way we never have to use names."

"No, I haven't a number. I presume they didn't think I'd need it. My job was just to ferry agents back and forth over the Adriatic."

"We'll call you 'A', then. That stands for American, and they'll understand." Bianca handed him a strip of thin paper that measured about four inches long and one inch wide.

For several minutes Penetti wrote steadily, filling both sides of the paper with small printed letters and numerals; then he rolled the paper tightly. Bianca handed him a metal container, into which he slipped the roll. While he was fastening the cap, Bianca went upstairs, returning with the pigeon. They bent the little strips of metal that projected from the side of the container over one of the pigeon's legs until it was fastened securely. Bianca, talking softly to the bird, left them and went out of the house to release it.

"I hope it makes the trip," said Penetti. "Some of the birds aren't reliable; they haven't been well trained. We're using so many of them these days that the supply is giving out."

"It can find its way back to Venice at night?" asked Bob.

"Yes, if it's a good bird. Otherwise it will perch near here, and wait until daylight."



"And when do you think it will be safe for us to continue making trips by air?"

"I don't know. It all depends on what happened to Camastra. We should know within a few days. We'd better be getting to bed now."

Bianca led the way upstairs.

“By the way,” said Penetti, as he was bidding Bob good-night, “don’t take off your clothes. Sleep in them, and keep your gun handy. It’s just good precaution, that’s all.”

CHAPTER IX

THE WRECK OF THE M3

THE night and the next day passed uneventfully. Penetti was up and away long before Bob's eyes were open, and Bianca explained that he had gone off to get some word of Camastra.

There was nothing to do except walk about the yard, and there was nothing to see, for the yard was surrounded by a stone wall. The minutes lagged along, while Bob impatiently waited for night and return of activity. For nearly an hour he was alone in the house. Bianca, after warning him to hide if the bell rang, had gone to the village to buy fish for their dinner. Bob was anxious to go with him, but Bianca threw up his hands in horror at the idea.

When Bianca returned, they cleaned the fish, and rolled it in corn meal; then placed it on a metal rack above the fire. It had browned on one side and Bob was turning it over when the bell rang. He dropped the fork, and hurried upstairs. When he heard Penetti's voice he came down again.

"Nothing new," said Penetti. "At least, we

have no trace of Camastra. But I don't think he's been captured. There is no telling where he went after he left Dignano."

"Where's that?" asked Bob.

"It's a town a few miles to the north of us."

"Oh, yes. I've seen it from the air."

"You see," continued Penetti, "he had a fight there yesterday afternoon. I couldn't get the whole story, but it seems that he attacked a man on the street. The only explanation is that the fellow recognized him, and Camastra hit him before he could say anything. The fellow is unconscious still, according to the gossip. Camastra got away from Dignano, but there's no telling where he is now. There's some chance that he's been arrested and that the officials aren't saying anything about it. My, that fish smells good! I'm starved, as usual."

Bianca put plates on the table, and they sat down to dinner.

"The situation is mighty critical," continued Penetti, "and I don't know what to expect. It all depends on Camastra. It's bad luck that you can't get back to Venice tonight." He turned to Bianca, and talked in Italian. "Bianca says that your uniform is upstairs. I think we had better bury it some place away from the house. We might

have to get out of here suddenly, and we wouldn't want that to stay behind as evidence."

"You're right," said Bob. "But tell me, what happens if Camastra doesn't come back?"

Penetti shrugged. "I haven't an idea. That is one difficulty with this kind of work. There is so much secrecy about it that one of us never knows what the others are doing. We simply have to follow instructions when we get them, and when no instructions come we have to use our wits and do the best we can. Camastra is the only one who knows everything that our agents are doing in this district, and perhaps there are some things that he doesn't know. And not even Camastra knows what our agents in Trieste are doing. In that way it isn't possible for any one agent to spoil the whole game by confessing. He can't confess to very much more than will condemn himself, you see. Not that any one thinks that you or I, or Bianca would confess if he were captured,—it's just to be on the safe side."

"I see," replied Bob. "And then, if Camastra doesn't show up, we will have to get out as best we can?"

"Exactly."

"This begins to look as though there may be some fun popping before long."

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," responded Penetti dryly.

It was dark when they finished dinner. Bianca left immediately. They saw him go out carrying a bundle that Bob recognized as his uniform. He returned after an hour and explained where he had hidden it. It was under a pile of old planks, just ten paces from the first fence on the way to the landing place.

"When Maniotto flies over for you—if he does at all—you can get it as you go down to the landing," said Penetti.

It was nearly midnight when they decided to go to bed. They had been waiting, half expectantly, for Camastra to re-appear, and the fire had made them drowsy.

Bob had scarcely shut his eyes when he became conscious of a faint hum in the air.

"Penetti," he called.

"Yes."

"That's an airplane. Do you hear it?"

"No."

"Listen again." There was silence for a moment.

"Yes, I hear it."

The hum continued for a moment, and then suddenly stopped.

"It has gone away," said Penetti. "An Austrian nighter bomber, probably."

"No, it hasn't gone away," replied Bob. "And it's no bombing plane. It's Maniotto in a Macchi and he is landing."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it. It's a Macchi, at any event. I can tell from the sound of the motor."

"Then that means that the pigeon didn't arrive."

"I suppose so. What shall we do about it?"

"You'd better start toward the landing. Does he know the way up here?"

"He has the directions, but he's never been here," replied Bob. He started down the stairs. "I'll go alone."

A minute later he was out of the gate and hurrying through the woods. He hurdled the ditch, and came to the fence. Here he paused, straining his eyes and ears to catch some indication of Maniotto or the Austrians. He remembered his uniform, hidden in the planks just a few yards away, but there was no time for hunting uniforms. He vaulted the fence and hurried on. At the second fence he paused again.

Faintly, he heard some one call, and he thought he had been seen; then came the response. Two

men were calling to each other in German. They were too far away to see or hear him. He vaulted the second fence, and hurried along the trail leading out on the point.

The fact that Maniotto might shoot him not knowing who it was, entered his head, but he decided to go ahead regardless of that danger. It was advisable to get as near the boat as possible. Occasionally he paused and listened. At last he heard the sound of boots on the dry twigs, and he stepped from the path close to the trunk of a tree. It took a breathless minute of waiting before Maniotto came close enough for him to speak.

"Maniotto," he whispered.

"Yes. Thorpe?"

"Yes." They shook hands. "We've got to duck out of here just as fast as we can. Didn't you get our message that you weren't to come?"

"No. And we can't go—the Macchi is wrecked."

"Wrecked?"

"Yes. One of the trees was out of place, and the bottom struck the rocks. The boat's full of water. I tried to get her off so that she'd sink, but I couldn't do it."

"Come along, then. We'll go back and sink the boat, and get back to Bianca's. I'm afraid we're in for it."

They started down the trail, Bob leading.

The bottom of the boat had been crushed, and the hull was resting on the rocks. They waded in up to their waists, and lifted. Slowly the hull rose, and they pushed it away from shore.

"Can you swim?" asked Bob.

"Not very well."

"You stay on shore then. I'm going to take her out and sink her."

Bob stripped off his clothes and plunged in. Standing on the deck, he poled the wrecked plane out until he could not reach bottom. Then he dived over, and swam along, pushing it. When the airplane was a hundred yards from shore, he climbed in again, and rammed more holes in the hull with the boat-hook; then he climbed out on the wings and tore the fabric. That done, he crawled through to the back part of the hull and poked more holes, so that no air could be trapped and keep the boat afloat.

Slowly the Macchi settled. Bob dived again and swam toward shore. He looked back and saw the airplane sink beneath the water.

By the time he reached the shore his teeth were chattering with the cold. And he realized for the first time, as he hurried into his clothes, what an excellent target his white body had made as he

was climbing over the Macchi. However, it would have been idiotic to leave the airplane there on the beach as positive proof for the benefit of the Austrians.

With their pistols out, they crept back toward Bianca's. If he had known a different route, Bob would have followed it, but he decided that time was too precious to permit exploring.

Anxiously he felt on the ground for the signal can. It was upright. He pulled the bell rope, and presently they heard Bianca coming to the gate.

"But I thought you had flown away," protested Penetti, when he saw them.

They explained what had happened.

"Bad luck!" he exclaimed. "But I'm glad you sunk the plane."

Bob sat on the edge of the fire box, warming himself after his cold bath. "And where do we go from here?" he sang.

"I'm awfully sorry I wrecked the boat," said Maniotto, ruefully.

"Rot!" exclaimed Bob. "You couldn't help it. I would have done the same thing; George would have, too. It wasn't your fault."

"It's kind of you to say so."

"Not kind at all. It's a fact."

"And so, Penetti," said Maniotto, "what are we going to do now?"

"If I could tell you that, I'd be a prophet. I'm wondering whether we hadn't better get out."

"And go where?"

"Any place to be away from here. I think the lightning is going to strike. But the trouble is that Camastra may come back looking for us."

"I think," put in Bob, "that we'd better stay by the ship." And then he added apologetically, "But I'm only an amateur, and so don't take my advice. You're the commanding officer, Penetti. We do whatever you say."

"I'm for staying," said Penetti. He turned to Bianca; "What do you say, old war horse? Shall we stay?"

"My child," answered Bianca, his face glowing, "I'll fight any ten men in the Austrian army with one foot on my own home ground."

"In other words," said Maniotto, "I think we are going to stay right here."

"So be it," answered Penetti.

They settled themselves around the fire, and Bianca lighted his pipe, sending out great clouds of smoke to be caught in the draught and shine in the glow of the coals.

"How is George?" asked Bob.

"Half crazy, because you're over here and he's in Venice. He was making practice flights when I took-off."

"I hope he doesn't try to make it over here."

"I don't think the Colonel will let him."

"Was he making good night landings?"

"Yes—doing splendidly, and studying the maps."

"Good old George. He'll be tearing his hair out."

Penetti interrupted:

"Maniotto, you'd better get out of that uniform." Then he considered it for a moment. "I hardly know what to tell you two men. You're not spies. You didn't come into this game for that purpose. You are simply soldiers who are doing your duty. If you get caught and you are wearing your uniforms, you will just be sent to a prison camp. But if you're not in uniform, you'll be shot. I think you'd both better stay in uniform, and if we have to get out of here you can give yourselves up—say that you were on a night flight, and that you wrecked your plane accidentally, for instance."

"Not a chance," answered Bob. "I'll not spend the rest of the war in a prison camp. Never!"

"Not for me," said Maniotto. "I'll play

the game to the finish. No prison camps for me."

"Well," said Penetti, "You know what it may mean. You can take your choice. I simply want you to do whatever you think you should."

"We'll stick with you," replied Bob.

"Good! That's what I hoped you'd do. And now, since I'm commanding officer, I order us all to bed."



A fresh wind had come up, and Bob, as he lay in bed, heard the shutters banging. He was wide awake in an instant. "What is it?" asked Mani-otto from across the room.

"Nothing—just a shutter, I guess."

"Oh."

Again they drifted off to sleep. A dry branch of a tree, tossed in the wind, scraped against the house. The noise brought them half out of bed.

"We have a bad case of the jumps," laughed Bob. "Let's forget about it, and really go to sleep."

"Right you are," replied Maniotto. "And here goes."

He pulled the blanket up under his chin, and settled himself in bed.

Suddenly there came the jangling of the bell. Not three long, and three short; but a steady, imperative jangling. They were out of their beds instantly.

"Come here," whispered Penetti from the head of the stairs. "Bianca is going to the door. You stand here with me."

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT AT BIANCA'S HOUSE

"AUSTRIAN police!" whispered Penetti. He bent down and listened to the conversation between Bianca and the five men who had followed him into the house. Bob could hear Bianca berating them in explosive tones.

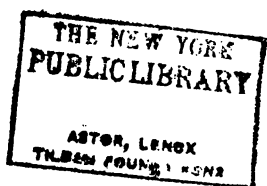
"They want to search the house," Penetti whispered again. "Bianca is calling them fools, and telling them to search and get out."

Penetti touched Bob's arm and pointed to a heavy chest that rested on the floor behind them. They tip-toed to it; each took one of the rope handles, and swung it to the edge of the stairs. Bob thought he intended using it as a barricade, but Penetti crouched down beside it, keeping one hand on the handle, and motioned Bob to do likewise.

Beneath them, the argument between Bianca and the police raged. Bianca was telling them what he thought of Austrians in general, and the Austrian police in particular. In noise, the argument was reaching a climax.



Bob and Penetti heaved the chest over



"Here they come," said Penetti. "Get ready."

Bob glanced over the edge and down the stairs. The glow of the fire filled the room with a faint red light, and on the wall danced the shadows of two men who were approaching the stairs. Penetti drew back, and they waited, watching the shadows grow larger. The clump of their boots changed as they touched the first stair.

Bob and Penetti lifted the chest clear of the floor, and heaved it over. In the crash that followed as the chest swept the men from the stairs, they could distinguish the hiss of the fire being extinguished. Bianca had overturned a bucket of water that had been resting on the edge of the fire box.

There came a yell, and then three shots were fired. Penetti, followed by Bob and Maniotto jumped for the stairs. Penetti fell headlong; Bob came feet first, and Maniotto retained his footing until he reached the bottom. There he stumbled and fell over Penetti and an Austrian who were fighting in the black darkness. He picked himself up just as the Austrian's gun exploded. In the flash of the explosion Bob saw Maniotto crouching over. From across the room came another pistol flash.

"Thorpe—Thorpe—I'm hit." It was Maniotto. Bob heard him fall to the floor.

Aiming at the last flash, Bob pulled the trigger, and then leaped to change his position. A bullet entered the wall behind him; he heard the Austrian who had fired run several steps, but it was not possible to gauge the direction.

He strained his eyes to catch some movement that would tell him where to shoot next. Many thoughts flashed through his mind as he lay flat on his stomach, with his pistol raised. Was Maniotto dead? Where was Bianca? How about Penetti?

For several moments there was not the least sound in the room. Then came the noise of a struggle near the door. It was Penetti and the Austrian, thought Bob. A gun flashed, pointing straight upward. It was the Austrian's gun, and Penetti—his finger clamped down over the finger of the Austrian—was firing it, wasting the bullets. There was a fusilade of shots, all of them aimed upward.

To Bob's eyes, straining in the darkness, the flashes were ample light. Across the room, he saw Bianca lunge forward, and grab the remaining Austrian. The shots stopped, but there was no need to see the rest. He could hear it. There

came a yell of terror that made him gasp; then a body struck the floor with such force that it shook the house. Bianca had picked the man up bodily, held him above his head, and thrown him down.

• Another moment of silence . . . then Bianca clumped across the room. He turned the electric flashlight on Penetti, who stood crouching over his Austrian. The man lay limply on the floor. Bianca went back across the room to the fire box, and lighted a candle.

“Penetti,” called Bob. “Tell Bianca to come here with that candle. Maniotto’s been shot.”

Penetti interpreted weakly, and Bianca hurried toward them, shielding the flame with his hand.

They turned Maniotto over gently. He was breathing.

✍ “Here, strip these clothes off,” ordered Bob. They pulled up the blood-soaked coat and shirt, and disclosed a bullet hole through the left side of his stomach. In his experience as an ambulance driver, Bob had seen many such wounds, and he had helped the doctors attend to them at the dressing stations.

“It’s not a bad wound,” he said, “but the greatest danger is infection from the bits of clothing carried in by the bullet. I don’t suppose

there's any antiseptic here. Any iodine? Bandages?"

"No," answered Penetti.

"Go see what you can find for bandages."

Two clean handkerchiefs served as pads to cover the wound, and some coarse linen, torn into strips, made bandages. Bob bound him firmly, as he had seen the doctors do. Maniotto opened his eyes.

"You'll be all right, old man," said Bob.

"Bianca says we'll have to be getting out of here just as fast as our legs will carry us," put in Penetti. "There isn't a minute to spare. Can Maniotto travel?"

"We'll have to carry him, of course."

"You go on," said Maniotto, weakly. "I'll stay here. Get away while you can."

"Not a chance," answered Bob.

For the first time since the fight had ended, Bob had a chance to look about the room. The Austrian with whom Penetti had fought was stretched out on the floor, alive but unconscious. Near him was the other man who had started up the stairs. He had been injured when the chest bowled him over. In the center of the room was an Austrian, face downward; Bianca had shot him when the fight started. And in the far corner was Bob's Austrian—the one who had shot Maniotto. Between

the door and the fire box lay the man Bianca had thrown on the floor.

“I wish I could do something for these poor beggars,” said Bob.

“No time,” answered Penetti. “There may be more outside the house. At any event there will be more of them along soon. We’ll have to get out immediately. Gather up a couple of those Austrian guns. We may need them. That chap I had gave me a pretty tussle. I fell right into his arms, and he grabbed me by the throat. I had to use both hands to keep him from turning his gun on me. Couldn’t find mine. Then I got at his throat.”

Each of them took an Austrian pistol, and a belt of cartridges.

“How shall we carry Maniotto?” asked Bob.

“Bianca can do it—just take him in his arms. Did you hear him throw that Austrian on the floor? It must have broken every bone in him. You and I will lead the way out of the house; Bianca will follow with Maniotto. Keep your guns in your hands. Ready?”

“Yes.”

Bianca picked Maniotto up tenderly.

“Tell Bianca,” said Bob, “to be careful and keep him as straight as possible.”

Maniotto's eyes opened, and he smiled.

"All right, old man?" asked Bob.

"Yes," he replied.

"Come on," said Penetti. He swung the door open, and they rushed out.

At the gate, Bianca stopped to give the signal



can a kick. It went sailing into the bushes. They followed the road for several hundred yards and then Bianca led them into the thicket. Presently they came upon a trail that took them away from the coast. An hour later, when daylight arrived, they were under a bridge, near St. Fosca, hidden completely.

Bianca put Maniotto on the ground, and, after warning them not to leave the hiding place, he disappeared.

Maniotto, from the shock of his wound and from loss of blood, was only partially conscious. When it became light enough, Bob examined the bandages and found that they had slipped slightly. He was re-arranging them, when Bianca appeared, carrying an armful of straw and a can of milk.

“For the sick one,” he explained.

“The straw’s fine,” said Bob, “but he can’t have milk. Nothing to eat for a week—not until his stomach begins to heal.”

Bianca was disappointed at that. He had milked three cows to get what amounted to about a quart. The Austrians, he explained, would be scurrying about all over the country looking for them, and he had not dared to take all the milk from one cow, fearing that the farmer might surmise what had happened and give that clue of their whereabouts to the authorities. Bianca turned to digging in the ground with his fingers, and presently brought forth two cans of sausage and an oiled silk package of hardtack. Camastra had put them there as an emergency ration, he explained. On this they made their breakfast, washing it down with the milk.

"Before it gets full daylight," said Bob, "I want to get some water. We must wash off Mani-otto's wounds."

Bianca took the can and went to the stream that flowed under the bridge. He returned with the water, and Bob unfastened the bandages. Mani-otto's eyes opened.

"Where are we?" he asked. Bob told him. "I feel much better now," he continued, "but my stomach is awfully sore. Did it go clear through?"

✓ "Yes, but it made a good clean hole."

Bob washed carefully around the wounds, replaced the bandages, and made Maniotto as comfortable as possible.

"Have you decided what we're going to do, Penetti?" asked Bob.

"I think that you and Bianca had better stay here," Penetti replied. "Bianca can forage for you, and you can take care of Maniotto. I want to locate Camastra. There's another rendezvous about ten miles from here and he may go there when he finds that we have left Bianca's house."

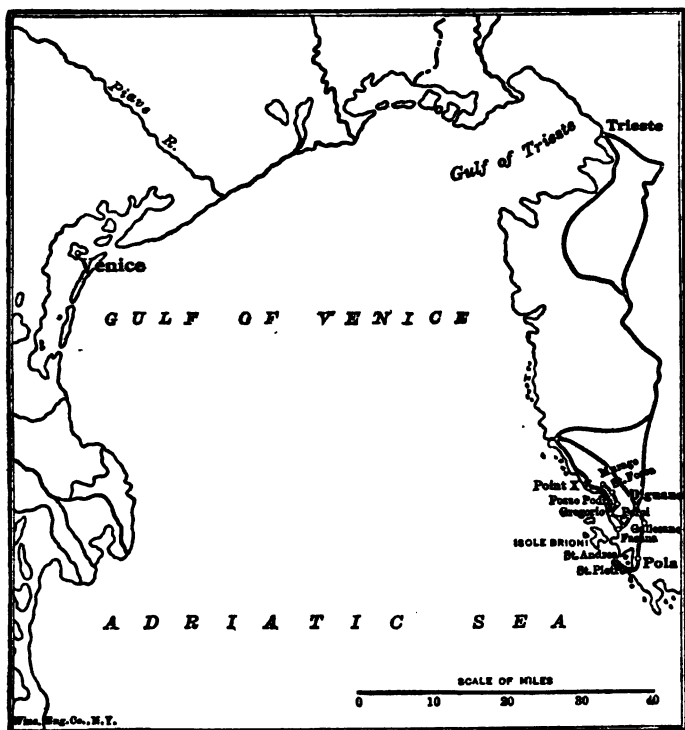
"And how long do you think it will take you?"

"I'll be back tomorrow evening."

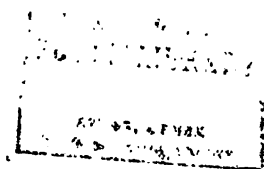
"You're going now?"

"Yes."

Bob lay down near Maniotto, and prepared to



Istria and the northern Adriatic.



get some sleep. He was tired out. It seemed as though weeks filled with the most intense action had passed since the previous morning. Maniotto was asleep, and Bianca was sitting with his back against the wall of their hiding place, dozing. Bob closed his eyes. Involuntarily his mind rehearsed all the details of the fight, and several times, just as sleep was overtaking him, he awoke with a start, and found his hands clenched. Then he heard the familiar droning of airplanes overhead. At first he thought that it was imagination, but as he listened it became more distinct.

Overhead were three planes—Macchi's—and he knew that the first of the three was George. They flew southward, and then turned out to sea.

"I'd just like to know what you're up to," said Bob, as he watched them disappear.

CHAPTER XI

GEORGE GETS INTO ACTION

/ COLONEL MARTINELLI was pacing back and forth along the runway as George landed and taxi-ed in.

“What did you see?” he asked anxiously.

“There appeared to be some people standing about the house, sir,” replied George, “and there was an automobile in front. I couldn’t see very well—the visibility was bad—but the photographs will show.”

The two men in charge of the photographic room at Sant Andrea had opened up the nose of his plane and were lifting the camera from its rack.

“Get those prints to me just as rapidly as you can,” ordered the Colonel. “Let’s go into the office and talk this over.”

George had been wakened by a messenger from the Colonel at dawn, and had made a hurried trip from the hotel to Sant Andrea. Maniotto had not returned with Bob, and no pigeon message had

been received. Patrols were to go out to search the route between Venice and Point X, the Colonel had said, and George was to head a photographic patrol.

"The searching patrols found nothing?" asked George, as they entered the office.

"No. After you left, a pigeon arrived—sent the night before last. The fool bird must have lost its way, or roosted either there or here for twenty-four hours. The message said that Maniotto was not to make the trip. Camastra had some trouble at Dignano, and the Austrians were on the alert."

"And you think they are captured?"

"There's no telling. It looks that way. You saw nothing else—nothing that you'd take to be a signal?"

"Nothing."

"The searching patrols covered every square inch of the way between here and Point X, and they saw no trace of them. It's possible that they landed with motor trouble and wrecked, but I hardly believe it."

For several minutes neither of them spoke. George sat looking at the map of Istria, wondering where on that map Bob was located, and what he was doing. He was willing to take any risk

in going to his assistance, but the possibilities were so numerous that he did not know which step to take. To patrol constantly in the Point X district would mean that the Austrians would be kept on the alert; and, on the other hand, not to patrol might mean that Bob's efforts to signal would be wasted.

"There is no other rendezvous except Bianca's house?" he asked.



"Yes, there is, but we can't take the risk of trying to signal to them, if that's what you mean."

One of the photographers came rushing in, carrying the wet prints. They spread them out on a sheet of glass, and examined them.

The pictures showed more than one hundred people standing in the vicinity of Bianca's house. There were several within the yard, but a guard had apparently been posted to keep the crowd out.

"That's an ambulance—the automobile in front of the house," said the Colonel. "And look here—another ambulance leaving the house." He pointed to another picture, showing the road. "Do you get any clue from those?"

"There must have been a fight, but that's all I can tell. There doesn't seem to be any way of knowing who came out ahead."

"Let's look at the landing. See here! The trees have been separated." He took up a magnifying glass. "No sign of the boat, though."

"What's that, Colonel?" George pointed to a spot about one hundred yards from the shore. "Is it just a discoloration on the paper, or something in the water?"

"I don't know, but I think—I think it's something in the water. Look at it."

George took the glass and studied the spot. "It's oblong, and it's lines are regular."

The Colonel jumped for the telephone and got the Naval Station on the wire. "How deep is the water one hundred yards north-north-west of the point in Istria at. . . ." He gave the exact longitude and latitude. For more than a minute they waited.

"Thanks," said the Colonel, and hung up the phone. "It ranges from two to three fathoms.

At that depth the planes of the Macchi would show."

"Then it is the Macchi—I'm sure of it."

They fell to studying the pictures, going over every point with the magnifying glass, searching for some further indication. At last the Colonel said:

"Morgan, notice this: There are very few guards posted at the house—two, at the most. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yes, it means that they are not guarding prisoners."

"Exactly."

"But the other guards might have taken prisoners away."

"Not before they attended to the wounded."

"Possibly not."

"At any event," said the Colonel, "knowing the men who were taking part in this venture, I'll make the guess that they are either dead or free. The first thing to do is to make sure which, and then we'll know better how to act."

"What about this other rendezvous? Do you think that there is any chance of their signalling from there?"

"Possibly. But I don't like to expose it by sending planes over. However, you might try a

photograph from an angle—not go over the place, you understand.”

“This morning?”

“Yes.”

Colonel Martinelli pointed out the town of Gallesano. “Just on the outskirts of the town, to the west, you’ll see three houses along the road leading to Fasano. It is the middle house.”

“Good enough. I’m off now. Are the other two planes to go along as protection?”

“Yes. And when you’ve passed Gallesano, go straight on over Pola as though you were making a checking-up trip.”

George led his patrol across the Adriatic, striking the coast just south of Point X. Then he circled down until Gallesano came within sight. Putting the Macchi in a steep bank, he snapped a series of pictures.

The patrol passed over Pola, and drew fire from the anti-aircraft batteries; then turned back toward Venice. The Colonel was waiting for them on the runway.

“Did you see anything?” he asked anxiously.

“Nothing. The house was distinct enough, but I couldn’t spot anything unusual about it. I took pictures at an angle of about forty-five degrees. They may show something.”

But the pictures contained nothing of interest. Carefully, they compared them with other pictures of the rendezvous and they could find no changes that might be taken as a signal. After an hour's work with the magnifying glass, they sat down to consider what the next move should be.

"Let's try to reconstruct the thing from their point of view," suggested George. "In the first place, they had a fight. The fight must have taken place after Maniotto arrived, because the Macchi is sunk off the point. The Austrians wouldn't have sunk it. That means that our men sunk the boat, had a fight and made a get-away after one o'clock in the morning. It is about ten miles from Bianca's to Gallesano, and that is pretty hard traveling at night, especially when you're going through rough country on foot. The chances are that they are camped out in the open, hiding and waiting for night to come again so that they can go on. Now, what could they use as a signal?"

The Colonel considered the question for a moment. "They probably couldn't signal until they reached Gallesano," he replied at last. "Once there, they might rig up something—laundry spread out on the ground, perhaps."

"Could they signal at night?"

"No—I doubt it. Perhaps, though, they could use a flashlight."

"Do you think it's worth trying?"

"Yes, you might try it."

"Tonight?"

"Yes—tonight. You had better use an M3 and take an observer along. Flashes from the ground are difficult to get unless you know where to look for them. I'll send Tamburri with you. He's an enlisted man, and a mighty good observer. What time do you think you'd better start?"

"About eleven, I'd say," replied George. "If they're traveling at night, they'll just about be getting under way."

"I'll give orders, then, for eleven."

After all, thought George, as the launch carried him to Venice, there was just a bare chance of receiving a signal, but it was a chance well worth taking. He was determined to go to Bob's assistance, and the thought of landing in Istria and making a search of the country had entered his head. He had dismissed the idea as impractical, because he could speak neither Italian nor German. There seemed no way for him to help them; and nothing to do except wait, and work in the hope of some signal that would indicate Bob's whereabouts.

He had dinner at the Pilsen, and answered numerous questions about Bob by saying that he was out of the city for a few days. Zannini had returned from a cruise in the S32, and was full of a story about how they had tried to come to the surface in Fiume Bay, narrowly escaping being sunk. It was a good yarn, and at any other time George would have enjoyed it immensely, but tonight he could scarcely follow Zannini's words. One thought kept drumming in his mind: Bob was in Istria, and he must be rescued.

He left the table just as soon as he had finished dinner, and spent the next hour walking about through the dark streets trying to evolve some plan of rescue. To go to Istria himself, and search would be worse than hopeless; it would be a menace to the others, rather than assistance. But it did seem apparent that some one must go. Once a rendezvous had been arranged on the coast, it would be easy enough to pick them up in airplanes or a boat.

Promptly at eleven o'clock, George took-off from Sant Andrea on his third flight that day to Istria. Tamburri, the observer, was beside him, and his presence gave George increased confidence. Tamburri had been flying across the Adriatic, night and day, for the past two years on bombing ex-

peditions. It was an old story with him, but it was George's first long night flight, and he was glad to have an experienced man with him.

They climbed steadily, leaving Venice behind them, until they had reached an altitude of seven thousand feet; then George leveled off. After a long wait of forty minutes, Tamburri touched him on the arm and motioned to go to the left and down; then he pointed to the right. Bob saw the dim outline of the islands that lay to the northwest of Pola. The wind had driven them southward.

With their motor throttled down, they covered the remaining distance to the coast silently; then Tamburri motioned "full out." George opened the throttle and glanced down. He saw the coast line slipping away behind them.

In the black night the roar of the motor seemed terrific—much louder than in the day time, thought George. But it was noise they wanted now, so Bob might know they were overhead. They turned northward and passed over Murago; each of them leaning out of the cockpit and gazing down. Then they turned about and went southward. An occasional flickering light beneath them would send their hopes soaring, and several times they curved

about to make certain that they had not missed a signal.

It was over St. Fosca that George yanked the Macchi around so suddenly that Tamburri grabbed his seat. George yelled and pointed. Far beneath them a small light blinked—three long and three short.

George shut the motor off, and then opened it wide. Tamburri studied the map, locating the point; then he pointed to the west. The light disappeared as they turned toward Venice.

The return flight seemed endless, and when the canals finally appeared beneath them, George put the Macchi in a glide so steep that the wind whistled past. Even the pause as they glided along above the water, with the Macchi losing speed for the landing, seemed interminable. At last the boat settled down, and the white spray tossed up from the side; George opened the throttle again and taxi-ed the remaining distance "on the step," almost flying. The boat had scarcely touched the landing when they jumped out and ran toward the Colonel's office.

"We found them!" exclaimed George.
"They're just north of St. Fosca."

Tamburri explained in Italian the course they had followed, and pointed out the location of

the signals. George slapped him on the back, and danced about the office. The Colonel snatched up the phone and asked for the Naval Station. George could catch just one word of the message, and that word was *subito*—immediately.

“I have an agent who will go looking for them,” he explained. “He’s coming here now from the Naval Station.”

“And shall I take him over?” asked George, forgetting that he had flown a total of more than eight hours since morning. Nothing would have pleased him more than to start on another trip that minute.

“No—motor boat. I don’t want to try sending another airplane across. They make too much noise, and Istria has had enough excitement for one day. A fast motor boat can make it in three hours.”

Colonel Martinelli pulled several photographic maps from the files, and began comparing them with the larger map on the wall. “This looks like a good landing place,” he said, pointing to a small bay just west of St. Fosca. He examined the photographs through the magnifying glass. “It looks like a sand beach. Here—I’ll get the Naval Station again.”

When he returned from the telephone, he said,

"It will do as a landing place—deep water and a small patch of sand beach. It's a deserted section of the country, and I don't think you'll be disturbed there."

"Am I to go?" asked George.

"I thought you'd probably like to."



"You bet I would!"

"But of course you're to come back with the launch. We may need you here tomorrow."

"Then we're not to pick them up tonight!"

"No—tomorrow night you'll return for them."

They heard the throb of the motor boat engines outside. Colonel Martinelli sent his orderly running to meet the agent and bring him to the

office. Tamburri, his services no longer needed, bade them good-night and left.

"This is Signor Lazzaro, Captain Morgan," said the Colonel, as the agent entered.

He was a small, elderly man; his face was ruddy and weather-beaten, and his hands coarsened by hard work. A pair of mild eyes that seemed quite in keeping with a certain apologetic manner greeted George. He was anything but the type of person one would expect to find in secret service work.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Captain Morgan," responded Mr. Lazzaro in French. "I understand you have been fixing up some work for me."

"Yes, a little."

"You are familiar with what has happened?" asked Colonel Martinelli.

"Only slightly. You see, I have been back in Italy only three hours." He laughed. "But one never likes to be idle. I ask for no rest until the war is over."

The Colonel told him as briefly as possible all that had happened in the last twenty-four hours; and pointed out the spot chosen as the rendezvous. "Further than that, Monsieur Lazzaro," he ended, "you're on your own."

"Very good. Have the boat stand off the coast each night from midnight until four o'clock. We'll hope to be together here tomorrow night, with all your precious children home again, Colonel."

"I hope so. Captain Morgan thinks that he'd like to go with you tonight."


"With pleasure. Let's be getting along."

George pulled on his flying suit. The night was cold, and a heavy fur-lined suit gave better protection than an overcoat. They went to the motor boat and took their places behind the cowl.

"Au revoir."

"Au revoir," answered the Colonel.

The twin-engines of the boat roared and they swung around the end of Sant Andrea, heading for the harbor entrance.



CHAPTER XII

ON TO POLA

FOR several minutes after the sound of the airplane engine had ceased, Bob sat in the tree from which he had signaled, holding the electric flashlight and thinking. Obviously, George had come looking for a signal, and having seen it, had returned to Venice. They could expect assistance from some quarter soon, but would the assistance come soon enough?

During the day, Maniotto's condition had grown serious. His temperature was high, and he was suffering intensely from his wound. The most important thing in Bob's mind was to get medical attention for him with the least possible delay. To wait patiently for assistance from Venice seemed out of the question, and yet where could they turn in an enemy country and ask for anything better than capture?

He put the electric flashlight in his pocket, and started down the tree. As he reached the ground, a group of men walked across the bridge under which Bianca and Maniotto were hiding. Bob

stood close to the tree trunk, until they had passed. He fingered the old felt hat, which was part of the equipment given him by Bianca, and wondered ruefully how it looked, now that it had a hole poked in the crown. To prevent the flashlight being seen from the ground, he had pushed it through the hat, using the hat as a funnel. He consoled himself with the thought that even with a hole in its crown it could not look much more ridiculous than when he first put it on at Bianca's house.

"My one chance," he said, "if I get mixed up with any people, is to be an idiot child who can neither understand nor talk, and I guess the hat will help."

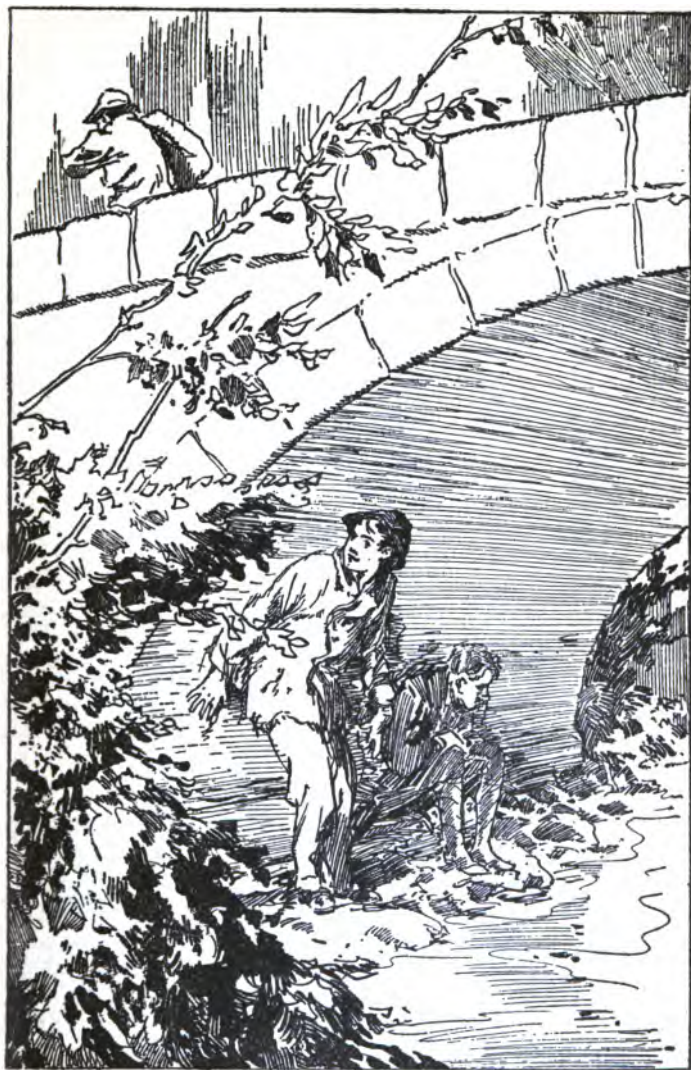
When the men had disappeared down the road, Bob hurried to the bridge. Maniotto was conscious.

"How do you feel?" Bob asked.

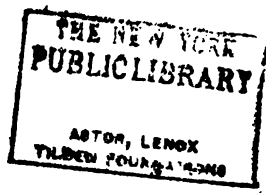
"Not very well," answered Maniotto, weakly. Until early in the evening he had insisted that he felt "all right," even though Bob knew he was suffering.

"I want you to do absolutely as I tell you, Maniotto," said Bob, severely. "Tell Bianca that you must have a doctor."

"Oh, no—I'll be all right."



Under the bridge at St. Fosca



"No, you won't. You do as I say."

"No."

"Bianca," said Bob. "*Medico—subito.*"

"No, no," protested Maniotto.

"Yes, absolutely."

Bob nodded his head violently to Bianca, who replied in Italian.

"He says that he is going to take me to Pola," Maniotto said. "Don't let him do it. What's the sense of it? You'll all be captured."

Bianca left the hiding place, warning them to wait for him.

"What's he going to do?" asked Bob.

"Oh, I don't know. You're crazy, I tell you, to even think of getting a doctor. What difference does it make if I do go west?"

"You be quiet, and go to sleep."

It was an hour later—nearly one o'clock—when they heard the rumble of a light wagon on the bridge. The wagon stopped, and Bob took the precaution of arming himself. Then he heard Bianca's voice.

"*Andiamo*—Let's be going," said Bianca as he came under the bridge. He took Maniotto in his arms, and Bob followed, carrying the straw.

"I wonder where he got the wagon?" asked

Bob as he made Maniotto comfortable in the box of the wagon.

"He says he borrowed it from a man he doesn't like," answered Maniotto.



Bianca climbed in the seat, yelled at the horse, and they started off down the road. Bob stretched out in the wagon beside Maniotto. "Try to go to sleep," he urged.

"Yes, if I can. But I'd rather talk now."

Bianca began to sing in a good tenor voice, gesticulating with the whip as though it were

a sword. Sometimes, when he came to a sentiment that needed emphasis he sang so loudly that Bob was sure he could be heard for miles around. But there was no effort for secrecy now; the whole world could know that they were on the road from St. Fosca to Pola.

"You know, Bob," said Maniotto, "Bianca's song makes me think that we're going to get away with this."

"Of course we are. But what is the song?"

"Oh, an old thing about how the man who is daring wins all the things the coward dreams about. The refrain says that the only things that are impossible are the things we're afraid to do."

Bianca sang on lustily, enjoying himself thoroughly. Bob watched his gestures and laughed. "What an old warrior he is! I wonder if he's ever been afraid in his life. I mean, afraid as you and I are sometimes when we get in a tight place."

"I doubt it."

They talked for a few minutes; then Maniotto fell asleep. Bob climbed up in the seat beside Bianca, who occasionally broke off his song to tell him the name of the town they were passing through, or point out something of interest. He was bursting with anecdotes, and never had Bob

regretted so much that he could not understand Italian.

It was three o'clock when Bianca pointed ahead and said, "Pola." Then he motioned to Bob to get back with Maniotto, and made it clear that he must not say a word.

Several times Bob raised himself on his hands and glanced ahead. They were approaching the city walls. The challenge of a sentry and the stopping of the wagon awoke Maniotto. Bob whispered: "We've reached Pola. Be quiet."

A long, involved conversation took place between the sentry and Bianca. Maniotto and Bob waited breathlessly. There was sarcasm and scorn in Bianca's voice. Presently the sentry went to the end of the wagon, and looked at them. They lay motionless. Then Bianca's voice rose again. At last the sentry ordered him to drive on, and they passed through the barrier into the city.

"That's the most amazing thing I've ever heard in my life!" exclaimed Maniotto. "He told him that we were sick, and that he was taking us to the hospital. The guard said that a doctor would have to come to the gate and examine us, and then Bianca let loose on him. He told him that he was the product of ten generations of

idiots; then he said that we were all spies and that we were coming to blow Pola off the map. He ended by telling the sentry that he—the sentry—would be shot for murder if we died here at the gate waiting for a doctor. Then the guard changed his mind and let us go through.”

The wagon rumbled down the city streets.

“Have you any idea where we’re going?” asked Maniotto.

“No—not the slightest.”

They turned up a side street and stopped. Bianca jumped from the seat. They heard him yank at a bell-pull; then came the faint tinkling of the bell. A door opened. Bianca stepped inside, and the door closed. Several minutes later they heard the door open again, and Bianca came to the wagon. He took Maniotto in his arms.

Bob followed them into a dimly lighted corridor, at the end of which there was a lighted room. A man came up the corridor to meet them.

“I am Doctor Rizzo,” he said to Bob, putting out his hand. “You will stay here with me for a few days—until your friend gets well.” He spoke perfect English.

“I’ll be mighty glad to stay with you, sir,” answered Bob. He was dumfounded at the casualness of their reception.

/ "Just come along with me," said the doctor. They went down the corridor and followed Bianca and Maniotto into the operating room. Maniotto was already stretched out on the table, and a woman was standing beside him. "This is my wife, Captain Thorpe." Bob shook hands with her.

"We're honored to have you here," she said.

"Well . . . I just can't tell you how I feel about it," he replied. "It's wonderful."

"Now," said the doctor, "step over there to the basin and wash your hands, Captain Thorpe. *Arrivederci*, Bianca." He slapped Bianca on the back and started him for the door. "And get into this when you've finished washing." He pointed to a long white shirt. "My wife will show you how to put it on." He started unfastening Maniotto's clothing.

Bob washed, and the doctor's wife held the white shirt for him; then she fastened it in back.

"Now run your hands under him and lift him up while I take these bandages off."

Bob's experience in the Ambulance Service stood him in good stead, now that he had become a doctor's assistant. He obeyed orders promptly and skillfully. Maniotto's eyes were open, and his face was white and set. Once he

tried to smile at Bob, but it was a smile that could not last long; the pain was too harsh.

"A little chloroform," said the doctor to his wife. She smeared Maniotto's face with grease, and then covered it with a gauze cone. The room became filled with the odor of the anæsthetic. "Throw these in the bucket," he said, "and bring me that basin of warm water. And now, wash your hands again."



It was a half hour later when the doctor applied new bandages to the wound. Mrs. Rizzo left the operating room to prepare the patient's bed; the doctor and Bob bathed him and put him in clean pajamas. Maniotto, coming out from the anæsthetic, was muttering; presently he began to sing, and Bob recognized the song as the one that Bianca had been singing on the road to Pola. The doctor caught the words, and gave Maniotto a pat on the shoulder.

"He'll be all right, I think. But it's lucky that you brought him when you did. Infection was beginning, and another twenty-four hours might have finished him."

When Mrs. Rizzo called to them that the bed was ready, they put Maniotto on a stretcher and carried him upstairs.

"Where's Bianca?" asked Maniotto hoarsely. "Hello, Bob."

"Bianca's gone," replied the doctor. "You go to sleep."

"Drink of water," muttered Maniotto.

The doctor gave him a teaspoon of water. "If you go to sleep now, I'll give you another when you wake up," he said. Maniotto's eyes closed.

"By the way," asked Bob, "where did Bianca go?"

"Back with the horses and wagon."

"Out of the city again?"

"Yes. Well, Captain Thorpe, I suppose you would know what to do with a bed, yourself?"

"I—I think I am tired, sir. There's nothing more to do for Maniotto? You don't want me to stay with him?"

"No—my wife and I will do that. You get to bed."

Mrs. Rizzo came into the room.

/"Good-night, Captain Thorpe. Sleep well."

"Good-night—I'll sleep well. No doubt about that."

He followed the doctor into another room.

"There," said the doctor, "is a tub of warm water, and there's a bed and a pair of pajamas. Sleep just as late as you please."

"Doctor, I don't know how to thank you. Perhaps, tomorrow, when I'm not so sleepy I'll be able to think of the words."

"Don't try. We are thankful that we can do something for you."

"But tell me, doctor, before you go, who are you—or, I mean, what are you? Here in Pola—you take us in, knowing who we are—and everything," he finished lamely.

"We're Austrian citizens," replied the doctor with a smile, "but I'm afraid our hearts are Italian. My wife, for example, is Camastra's sister."

"Oh! Have you heard from him?"

"Not a word. But don't worry about that. Get some sleep—you're dead tired. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Bob was so tired that for a moment he doubted whether he could keep his eyes open long enough to undress. The past three days had contained

so much exertion and excitement and so little sleep that he was exhausted, but he had not realized it until now, when a comfortable, white bed stood before him. His eyelids seemed weighted, and his feet so heavy that it was an effort to lift them; his arms felt stiff and numb. He pulled off his clothes, letting them drop on the floor, and slipped into the warm water. Once he caught himself falling asleep in the tub. He got out, dried himself, pulled on the pajamas and went to bed. In an instant he was fast asleep.

At that moment, George Morgan was asleep, too—stretched out on the seat of the motor boat, speeding back to Venice—and Lazzaro was hurrying across from the landing to St. Fosca.

CHAPTER XIII

GEORGE BRINGS DOWN AN AUSTRIAN

For a moment, after he awoke, Bob could not imagine where he was. Then he recalled the previous night, and jumped from bed. He looked out of the window at Pola and the harbor. There were the battleships he had seen from the air; the island where the airplane squadron was stationed, and, to the left, the arsenal. He stood gazing out, wondering just what emotion one should feel on such an occasion.

The situation was serious and precarious, to say the least, but, perhaps because it was so serious and precarious, he could think of it only as amusing and bizarre. To be, through a series of mishaps and adventures, in an enemy country, where capture would cost him his life, was unusual enough; but to be comfortably installed in Pola, the stronghold of the Austrian navy, was such an astounding adventure that serious possibilities were outshone and made insignificant. How were they to get out? Out of Pola? Out

of Austria? And back to Venice? Such questions flashed into his mind, and he chuckled.

The words of Bianca's song came into his mind: The man who is daring wins all the things a coward dreams about. Well, daring had brought them there, and daring would doubtless get them out again.

He turned from the window, and began collecting the clothes he had strewn about the floor. He washed and dressed, and went out into the corridor. The doctor was just coming from Maniotto's room.

"Good morning, Captain Thorpe. Did you sleep well?"

"Wonderfully. How is Maniotto?"

"Coming along nicely. He wants to see you. Are you hungry?"

"Starved!" answered Bob. "I could eat the carpet right off the floor."

"We'll fix that," said the doctor. "You go in and talk with Maniotto for a minute, and I'll go down and have them fix something to eat."

"By the way, doctor, what time is it?"

"Half past four."

"Half past four!" echoed Bob.

"Why, yes; it was after five when you went to bed. I didn't expect you up for hours yet.

You didn't do well at all. The last time Camastra was here, he slept for twenty hours; got up and had breakfast, and then went back to sleep again. But you go in and see Maniotto—and don't stay more than a minute."

Maniotto's eyes were wide open, and he had a real smile on his face when Bob entered the room.

"Hello, old man," he said. "Can you beat it, Bob? We're here in Pola! Can you believe it?"

"I couldn't until I looked out and saw the harbor."

They laughed. Maniotto's face changed and he clutched at his stomach. "Oh, I don't want to laugh," he said. "I've changed my mind. It makes me feel as though I'd swallowed a handful of fish-hooks."

"The doctor said that you are coming along splendidly," Bob told him. "You'll be up within a few days."

"I hope so. And I'm beginning to feel hungry."

"Speaking of being hungry—good-by. My minute is about up, and food is waiting below."

"I'll be with you soon," replied Maniotto. "And in the meantime I'll sleep. By the way, Bob, I wonder what Penetti will do when he finds that we've gone?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Bianca will locate him and tell him what's happened."

"And did you know that Mrs. Rizzo is Camas-tra's sister?"

"Yes, the doctor told me last night."

"We've tumbled into a soft nest."

"Indeed we have. I'll see you later."



Mrs. Rizzo met Bob on the stairs.

"I was just coming to get you," she said. "Breakfast is ready. I'm sorry that we haven't much to give you. Food is scarce over here."

Breakfast consisted of fruit, corn meal mush and a stew of goat's meat. Bob was ravenously hungry, and he laughed at Mrs. Rizzo's apologies. "I've never tasted anything so good," he said.

The doctor and Mrs. Rizzo sat at the table with him while he ate.

"The lack of food," said the doctor, "is what is making the Austrians and the Germans lose the war. The people have nothing—nothing. For the present we can get corn, but there is practically no wheat. That is the first meat we have had in the house for more than a week."

"Oh, and I've gobbled it all up," said Bob regretfully.

"Don't worry your head about that," replied the doctor. "I went out and bought it for you this morning. I wanted you to have it—you need it. Being a doctor, I can buy such things as meat, but we seldom eat it ourselves."

"Well, please don't give me any more of it, then," asked Bob.

"You obey your doctor's orders," said Mrs. Rizzo, laughing. "My brother objects violently, just as you do, but you men who come on these missions must have food to give strength to your good right arms."

"I'll be a camel," replied Bob, "and live on my hump. By the way, Mrs. Rizzo, tell me about your brother."

"There's nothing to tell," she replied. "We know he is in this country—that's all."

"You don't think he's been arrested?"

"No, I'm sure he hasn't. When was it you last saw him?"

Bob told her about the night at Bianca's house.

"And do you like Bianca?" she asked.

"Indeed I do! He's a wonder."

"My brother fairly worships him," she replied. "You see, Guido—my brother—knew him years ago. Guido was just five then. My father came here as Italian Consul, and we lived here for twelve years. I was born just a few blocks from this house. It was Bianca who taught him to sail a boat, and to swim; it was Bianca who taught him to ride and shoot. In fact, Bianca was his idol. When vacations came, Guido would rush away to Bianca's house, and sometimes my father would have to go and fairly drag him back to school. Then, when Guido was seventeen, we moved to America—to New Orleans—and he entered Harvard Medical School a year later. It was in Boston that I met my husband. He was first year when Guido was last year, and they were drawn together because they had both lived in Pola. At the end of the year, I was married to Doctor Rizzo, and returned here, but Guido stayed in America until the war started."

"And so that's how you all speak English so

well," said Bob. "I was wondering about it."

"Yes, we feel that we're a good part American. And we're pleased to have an American here with us."

"But not so pleased as the American is to be here."

The doctor left them to visit Maniotto.

"But, tell me," said Bob, "isn't your brother so well known here that there's danger of his being recognized?"

"Yes," she replied, "there is some danger. We think that is what happened in Dignano. But we don't worry. He is very good at taking care of himself, and I don't think the authorities will trouble us. You see, the situation in Istria is very difficult for the Austrians. Practically the entire population is against them. Doctor Rizzo works constantly for the poor people here; gets food for them, attends to them when they're sick, interferes when the Austrians mistreat them. If we were arrested it would cause trouble. The Austrians are afraid of a revolution, and they take good care not to let trouble start. I'll show you now where you are to go if anything should happen."

They left the dining-room and went toward the

rear of the house. "Here are the back stairs," she explained, and she opened the door of a small closet underneath. Grasping two hooks on which coats were hanging, she pushed upward; the panel of wood slipped up, disclosing a dark hole.

"It's small," she said, "but it's safe. The doctor fixed it up when war was declared. There were two men who appealed to us for assistance, and it was necessary that they get back to Italy. At that time the Austrians dared to be very strict, and they were searching the houses. My husband thought of this cubby hole, and we had just completed it when the authorities came on a searching party. They found nothing, of course; and since then we've used it many times. In case there is any trouble, you must get in here at once. You can come down the back stairs."

She showed Bob the library, where he might find American books, and the roof, where he might sit and look out over the city. The roof was flat, and they had arranged a little summer garden there; but now the vines were withered by winter. The garden was protected in such a way that he could be there without running the risk of being seen from the street.

Maniotto was sleeping when Bob returned to see him, and so he went to the library and read until

dinner time. After dinner the doctor, Mrs. Rizzo and Bob talked of America and what the United States were doing in the war. They were amazed at the number of troops, and the shiploads of supplies that had crossed the Atlantic.

"We get the German reports, of course," said the doctor, "and they say that practically all of the transports have either been sunk, or have turned back for fear of being sunk. Of course, we know they're liars, but I really thought their submarines were giving you quite a bit of trouble."

✓ The question they were most anxious to have answered was: "When do you think the war will end?" They were relieved when Bob replied that he thought they would see the last of it before fall. They, too, thought that Germany and Austria would go down to defeat before another winter came.

"We're exhausted on this side of the lines," said Mrs. Rizzo. "The soldiers are on the point of rebellion and the civilians are starved."

They talked until late, hoping that Bianca, or some other agent, would arrive with news. No one came. At last they went upstairs to bed, stopping for a moment at Maniotto's room. He was sleeping soundly.

Early the next afternoon Bob heard the hum of motors overhead. He was in Maniotto's room.

"Macchi's!" exclaimed Maniotto.

Bob rushed out and up to the roof. Far above him he could see three machines. It was the checking-up patrol coming to count the battle-ships. As the machines came nearer and nearer, Bob's gaze became fastened on the leader. "It's George," he muttered. "I'll take my oath it's George." There was some little mannerism in the way the pilot handled his plane that made Bob so sure.

Mrs. Rizzo came up and joined him on the roof just as the "archies" commenced to break.

"Do you see that first pilot—the one who's leading?" Bob asked excitedly. "That's my pal—George Morgan."

"But how do you know?"

"I can tell by the way he flies."

White and black shell puffs appeared around the machines; and soon the "cru-ump, cru-ump" of the bursts could be heard. The machines turned slightly, leisurely; crossed over the city, and curved about.

"Don't those shells bother you in the air?" asked Mrs. Rizzo. "The pilots seemed to pay no attention to them."

"The Austrians aren't very good shots," Bob replied. "When a good battery gets into action, it can make us jump. Those shells aren't coming within a mile of the planes."

The Macchi's were heading back over the city.

"Look!" exclaimed Mrs. Rizzo, pointing towards the bay. Five Austrian planes were taking-off, and climbing.

Bob shielded his eyes and watched George's plane intently. He saw the machine tip from side to side.

"He's going to fight 'em! Good old George! He's going to fight 'em! Go to it, George!"

The Macchi's turned again, staying over the city. Then Bob saw George's plane jump up and down.

"There he goes!" he exclaimed. "Watch him! Go to it, George!"

The Macchi's turned downward, diving into the battle. The five Austrians, who doubtless expected to go through the daily farce of "frightening" the Italian planes away, were apparently disturbed. Their formation was ragged, and they scurried about, each man for himself. The "archies" stopped, and the air was filled with the whir of motors.

Bob, his arms held as though he were driving

a plane, urged George into the fight. George's machine plunged down; then it flipped over into a steep bank, and a wing-slip. George was playing for position. An Austrian made a feint as



though to attack. George turned and started for him; the Austrian thought better of it and ducked. The manœuvre brought George into attacking position for another Austrian. He "zoomed" up.

From the roof they saw the Austrian plane lunge downward; then came the ta-ta-ta-ta of

George's machine guns. The Austrian plane entered a spinning nose dive.

"He got him!"

Twisting slowly, the plane fell closer and closer to the harbor.

There came the roar of four more Austrian planes that were taking-off. "You'd better get up there," said Bob, laughing.

The falling plane struck the water; there came a great splash, and a few minutes later the wreckage came to the surface.

The scattered Austrians milled about, giving a great show of activity but accomplishing nothing. Their tactics were defensive, and, because they had the faster machines, they could keep out of danger's way without actually giving up the battle, and landing. They were so evidently just going through the motions of fighting that Bob laughed. He saw George plunge down at one of them; the Austrian escaped in a nose dive. Another Austrian machine returned to the landing ground, leaving a trail of steam behind it. The engine had been put out of commission.

The Macchi patrol re-grouped itself and made two figure eights above the city, while the Austrians cruised about at a lower altitude.

"That is calling 'Seeing Austria first,' " ex-

plained Bob. "The Germans are good fighters, but I can't say as much for the Austrians."

"No, they're not what you'd call valiant," replied Mrs. Rizzo. "That is the attitude of the whole Austrian army now. The men know that the end is near, and that Austria is going to lose; they don't want to risk their lives for nothing. But the German pilots are still fighting!"

"Yes, like wildcats," replied Bob. "They are good pilots, and, as we say, 'full-out merchants.'"

"What does that mean?"

"Oh, that they're ready for a fight any time and any place—a regular tooth-and-toe-nail fight to the finish."

"You admire them?"

"Yes, in a way. Of course, I despise them and I want to see them licked within an inch of their lives, but the pilots are good fighting men. They put up a clean fight, and they're willing to go the limit."

"Then there still remains a feeling of sportsmanship between the pilots on the French front?"

"Yes."

The Macchi's made one more turn above the city; then headed out to sea. The Austrian planes came gliding down.

"I owe George a dinner for this day's work,"

said Bob. He told Mrs. Rizzo about their near-fight on the first day in Venice, and how he and Maniotto had enjoyed a dinner at George's expense. The Macchi's were disappearing—three small specks in the sky, growing smaller and smaller. Within a few minutes they would be nosing down into the Sant Andrea canal. "So near, and yet so far," muttered Bob. "I wonder when I'll be there to buy George that dinner."

Then he hurried down to Maniotto's room to give him an account of the battle.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RENDEZVOUS AT GALLESANO

GEORGE's patrol, untouched by Austrian bullets, landed at Sant Andrea, and the pilots went to the office to file their report.

"One Austrian put down, and another sent home with a crippled engine," said George.

"Good work!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Tell me about it."

George traced their route on the map, and described the fight. "As pilots," he said, "they are good truck drivers. One 'full-out' pilot in a Spad could put them down in one-two-three order. It would be just like pointing your finger. They can't manœuvre, they can't shoot, and they don't know ~~very~~ much about flying—aside from that they are good pilots. Do you think it would be possible, Colonel, for me to get a Spad and try it?"

The Colonel smiled and shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not," he said. "The point is, Captain Morgan, that there is nothing to gain by it.

You see, we're more interested in the navy at Pola than in the airplanes. We want to know what the ships are doing. And what would be the result if we went over there and cleaned up on the Austrian pilots? They would go hunting all over Austria until they found about a dozen of their best combat pilots, and then concentrate them there. After that, every time we went across to observe the ships, we'd have a fight on our hands. As it is now, we can go and come whenever we please. They pretend to drive us away, and so long as they are satisfied we can't have any objection. We see their ships, and we know what they are doing. If we couldn't make these checking-up trips, the Italian navy would be patrolling the entire coast trying to ward off surprise attacks, while the Austrians could concentrate. You see the advantage?"

"Yes. But it was all right to stir them up today, and have a little fight?"

"Oh, yes—a bit of excitement now and then is good for them. And congratulations on your success."

"Thank you, sir."

"And, by the way, are you going with the motor boat tonight?"

"I don't believe I shall," answered Geo.

"After all, I can't do anything to help them if I'm in the boat—just sit there and wait, hoping that they'll come. Of course, it would be great to see Bob, but I think I'd better stay here. There may be something for me to do—you may want to have me fly across. A message may come from them, or something of that kind."

"Yes, I agree with you," answered the Colonel. "I might want to use you. You could come out here to live. Maniotto's room is vacant. I'd like to have you handy. I'll let you know what message the boat brings back."

The next morning George was awakened by a messenger from the Colonel. The boat had returned, but nothing had been heard from Lazarro, or the others.

At about the same moment that George was receiving this discouraging message, Lazzaro was rapping on the door of the rendezvous at Gallesano. He had scoured the district of St. Fosca thoroughly, finding no trace of the men. His orders had been to avoid Gallesano if possible, and to go there only after all other efforts had failed.

An old woman answered the door.

"Signora," he said, "I am famished."

"Ah, my poor man, and so are we," she an-

swered. "We've been hungry these many months."

"And I've been hungry these many days. There's little difference between old hunger and new hunger. They both attack the same spot."



"Well, come in," she said. "I'll see what I can do."

He entered the room, and bowed to the two men who were sitting near the fire. They glanced at him, nodded, and resumed their smoking. Presently the old woman returned, carrying a loaf

of black bread, and a pot, which she put on the fire.

"Get out to the fields, you lazy men," she scolded. "Don't sit here, hugging your empty stomachs."

They did as she ordered, and Lazzaro found himself alone with her.

"You are here alone all day, signora?"

"Sometimes I have company," she answered craftily.

"And today?"

"I have you."

She poured him a cup of the hot liquid that served as coffee, and broke off a hunk of bread.

"Sit down beside me," he said. He told her frankly who he was, and why he had come. She heard his story without comment, and when he had finished, said:

"Wait here." She left the room.

A few minutes later, Lazzaro heard the crunch of boots on the gravel in front of the house. The door opened and a man entered. It was Penetti.

"I am from the island," said Lazzaro.

"Stand over here where I can see you better," replied Penetti. "Ah, yes, I know you. Weren't we in the same tangle at Trieste one night? You are Lazzaro."

"Yes, and you are . . .?"

"Penetti."

"Of course."

Their identities established, the two men sat down. Lazzaro explained his mission.

"They have disappeared," answered Penetti. He told about the fight at Bianca's house, the flight to the bridge with Maniotto wounded, and how he had returned to find them gone. "There was no trace of them. Apparently they were not captured, for there were no signs of a fight. But I did not dare to linger there. Leaving a message was quite out of the question, of course."

"Naturally. And how do things stand in Istria?"

"Up-side-down. The peninsula is wildly excited. The police are scurrying about, not daring to arrest the Italians for fear of a riot, and not daring to let them alone for fear of what our men are doing. If the others are safe, and we can remain quiet for a week or so, the police will begin to think of other things."

"And the propaganda work?" asked Lazzaro. "How has it gone?"

"Wonderfully. And without our doing much to push it. After the raid on Bianca's house it became known that we were here; and that

alone was enough to start the Italian sentiment raging. At Dignano there was a riot when the police tried to prevent a meeting, and here at Gallesano there was a big demonstration. And, they say, the Italians in Fiume started out to clear the streets of Austrian soldiers."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Lazzaro. "I don't suppose they know that an American officer is here in Istria."

"No."

Lazzaro's brows knitted. For a moment he was deep in thought; then he looked up and smiled.

"Wouldn't it be a good move to have Thorpe appear at one of these Italian meetings?" he said. "Time it, so that the meeting would come just before we made our escape. Gather the leading Italians for a secret conference; produce Thorpe, let them see him, and then duck out."

"Yes, if we could do it. It's risky, but it would have a wonderful effect. The people here are stuffed full of German propaganda. They think that no Americans have crossed the ocean, and that America is just bluffing. To see an American—actually see him standing before them, and hear him talk—would bring them up on their feet."

"That's what I mean. Could we do it? I'm none too familiar with this district, you know, and I'm not sure of myself here. Trieste is my stronghold. But I offer it as a suggestion."

"It would be the sensation of the war here in Istria," replied Penetti, after a pause. "I wonder where we could hold the meeting."

"Wouldn't Peroi be a good place?" asked Lazzaro. "The landing is just a few miles from there."

"How far?"

"Between four and five miles."

"Too far for a quick get-away."

"I'll meet the boat and have them land farther south," said Lazzaro. "What's the name of that little bay just northwest of Peroi?"

"Do you mean Gregoria?"

"Yes."

"That would do well enough, but the most important thing is to find Thorpe. Once we get him, we can talk business."

"But you're confident that he hasn't been captured, and that we will find him?"

"Absolutely."

"And how are we going about it?" asked Lazzaro.

"Through Bianca. Find Bianca and we have Thorpe."

"And Camastra?"

"No one knows what has happened to him. The earth has swallowed him up—he may be dead, or in Venice, or in jail."

It was late in the afternoon when Penetti said: "I'm for that plan of having Thorpe appear at an Italian meeting. But it just occurs to me that his uniform is hidden near Bianca's house."

"Can you get it?" asked Lazzaro.

"Yes."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. I can get the uniform tonight, and spend tomorrow at the bridge. Tomorrow night I'll be back here."

"Excellent. I'll go to the landing tonight, and tell them to be off Gregoria after this. I'll meet you at the bridge tomorrow morning."

After another meal of bread and imitation coffee, the two men started out. Late at night they parted, north of St. Fosca.

George, in Venice, had gone to bed, and he was still awake, his thoughts divided between Bob and the patrol he was to take over Venice the next morning. Suddenly he laughed; then he jumped out of bed and turned on the light. After search-

ing through his luggage for several minutes he found the thing for which he was hunting—a pair of old shoes. He snorted with laughter. Then he tied the strings together, and hung the shoes over the foot of his bed. Still chuckling, he put out the light and returned to the covers.



When he was awakened the next morning to go out on patrol, the messenger gave him a note from the Colonel. It read:

“Boatmen received instructions from L to change landing three miles farther south. No information.”

That meant some activity in Istria, and George wondered what Lazzaro had found. Had he discovered Bob?

George glanced at his watch and saw that he must hurry if his patrol was to get away on time. His eyes fell on the shoes, and he snorted. Putting on his slippers, he went to the room shared by the two pilots who were to follow him on patrol. After listening to his plan, they too began rummaging in their luggage, producing old shoes.

And when they left the quarters, each pilot had shoes dangling from his arm. They waved away all inquiries as to what they intended doing with them.

CHAPTER XV

BLANCA AND THE POLICE

Bob was awakened by the noise of the Macchi engines. He jumped from bed, slipped into some clothes, and went to the roof. The planes were circling over the city, and "archies" were spattering the sky. No Austrian planes rose to meet them, and Bob wondered if the hour was too early for the pilots to be at work. Probably, he thought, they had no desire to repeat the last battle.

The Macchi's were directly above the city when Bob saw three black specks—things dropped from the planes. They were not bombs, surely. And they weren't packages of printed propaganda, such as the pilots sometimes dropped.

The artillery doubled its fire; the planes turned and headed seaward. Bob stood for a moment wondering what it was that the pilots had dropped.

He went to his room, finished dressing, and then went downstairs for breakfast, hoping that some message that would indicate their next move had come during the night. The excitement of being in enemy country had worn away, and Bob

was beginning to count the minutes of each day. Maniotto was recovering rapidly, but he was not allowed to have company more than two hours a day—one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The doctor emphasized the value of complete rest and relaxation for him, and he spent the greater part of the day and night in sleeping.

Bob roamed about the house nervously, hoping that Bianca would return bearing news of Camastra. Since the night of their arrival nothing had been heard of Bianca. In fact the only news that had reached him was brought by the doctor on his return from visiting patients. He said that Istria was in a furore; rumors of Italian activity were afloat; the story of the Austrian raid on Bianca's house had spread like wildfire, and the police were taking great precautions against a civilian outbreak. There was one rumor that Bianca had been captured, but the doctor disproved it by running the story down and finding that the supposed capture had taken place at Bianca's house the night of the fight.

"Nothing new," said the doctor, as Bob entered the dining-room. "Maniotto gets his first food this morning, though."

"That's something, at least," replied Bob. "He must be starved. By the way, doctor, what

was it the pilots dropped overboard from the Macchi's this morning?"

"I hadn't heard of anything. Why?"

"I went up on the roof just as they came over the city, and I saw something drop."

"I'm sure I don't know. You don't think it could have been some sort of message, do you?"

"Oh, no. They wouldn't try dropping messages."

"I'll ask when I go out this morning."

After breakfast they went to Maniotto's room, Bob carrying a bowl of gruel.

"Food!" exclaimed Maniotto as they entered the room. "Food! Let me at it!"

"Slowly," cautioned the doctor. "Here, Captain, you feed him—about a half a teaspoon at a time. If he gulps it he'll be tied up in a bow-knot with the cramps. He can have as much of it as he wants."

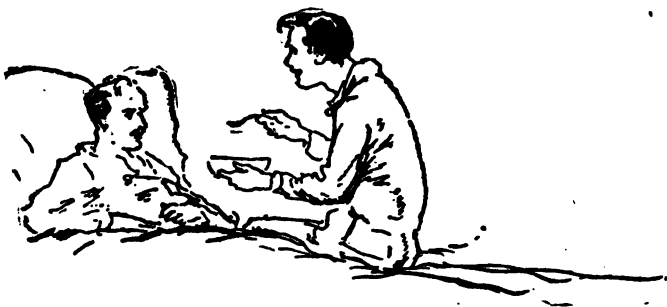
"Can I?" asked Maniotto. "Then send up about five more bowls."

"I don't think so," replied the doctor, laughing. "You eat that and then see how you feel about it. I'm going out now. You take care of the patient, Captain."

"I'm a fine nurse," replied Bob.

He sat on the edge of the bed, giving Maniotto

little dabs of gruel on the end of the spoon, and telling him about the Macchi patrol he had seen earlier in the morning. Together, they tried to puzzle out the mystery of the things Bob had seen coming down from the planes. Maniotto ran-



sacked his brain for some memory of a similar bombardment, but nothing that he could recall seemed to offer an explanation.

In their conversations, they avoided the problem of getting out of Austria and back to Venice. Until they heard from Camastra or Bianca it was useless to worry or plan. And, too, Bob felt that it was better to have Maniotto spend his convalescence feeling that he was in perfect security, and that the future would take care of itself. He laughed at Maniotto's idea that they should have left him behind; that he had put the entire mission in jeopardy.

"I'm sorry," said Maniotto, "but I think I've had enough." He had taken about ten swallows of gruel. "It doesn't rest any too securely. Perhaps I'll have a little more later."

"Who was it that ordered five more bowls?" said Bob, laughing.

"I'll make up for it when we get back to Venice—at the big dinner you're going to give George."

They heard the tinkling of the door bell; Bob went to the corridor and stood listening. The door opened and closed; then Bob heard Bianca's voice.

"It's Bianca!" he exclaimed.

"Fine! Go down and get the news, and then come up and tell me about it," replied Maniotto.

Bob hurried downstairs, and found Bianca with Mrs. Rizzo in the library. Bianca jumped to his feet, grabbed him and hugged until Bob could feel the bones grinding within him.

"And what's the news?" Bob asked, when he was released from the embrace.

"He thinks my brother is either in or near Pola," replied Mrs. Rizzo. "Penetti is probably at Gallesano, but Bianca didn't go there."

The door to the street opened, and the doctor called to his wife:

"I've some news for Thorpe."

"And we have some news for you," his wife answered. "Bianca is here."

After Bianca and he had greeted each other, the doctor turned to Bob and said, "You asked me about the things dropped from the planes this morning. Well, the first person I met on the street told me about it. The whole town is laughing, and the Austrians are so mad they can't speak."

"But what is it?" asked Bob, mystified.

"Each pilot dropped a pair of old shoes."

"Old shoes!"

"Yes, and each pair had a message attached to it: 'Have these shoes repaired by the Pola cobblers who call themselves aviators. We will be back for them tomorrow.'"

Bob howled and dropped into a chair; Bianca danced around the room.

"And one of the messages," continued the doctor, "was written in English."

"Oh, George Morgan!" laughed Bob. "You wild Indian! I'm going to dash up and tell Maniotto about it."

Maniotto laughed until his wound hurt him. "Get out of here," he said, clutching his stomach.

“Get out of here and stop laughing before I split open.”

When Bob returned to the library, Bianca was seated with his head in his hands, still chuckling.

It took Bianca nearly an hour to tell his story,



while the doctor and Mrs. Rizzo interpreted for Bob.

“When I left here,” he said, “I drove out of the city, after paying my usual compliments to the pig-headed sentry who stands at the gate. At Peroi I was stopped by three brave Austrian policemen who were out looking for a very bad man who had treated some of their comrades

roughly. And it was a sad tale they told. It seems that this bad man's name is—or was, for it is rumored that he has been shot—Bianca. Have you ever heard of him? Yes? Well, then you know what a desperate character these three brave Austrians were after. They told me that five of their comrades had gone to pay Bianca a visit one night—just a friendly little visit. What did the unspeakable brute do but shoot them, and batter them beyond all recognition! Wasn't that a terrible thing to do?

“Opinion is divided on the subject of the fight. Some say that Bianca did all the carnage himself, single handed, and others say that he had an army waiting in ambush to attack the policemen. Figures run all the way from none to fifteen.

“The policemen wanted to know if I had seen the terrible Bianca along the road, and I replied, ‘Heaven forbid.’ I asked them if Italians were as bad as the stories told about them—for it seems that Bianca was suspected of favoring the Italians—and they said that they were as bad, and worse, than the stories.

“They said that they were bound for Pozzo Padin, and asked if I would take them along. I assured them that it would be a pleasure, and that I would be glad to have the protection of three

brave policemen against the wicked Bianca, who might be expected at any moment to jump from the bushes and tear me into small, small pieces. And so they climbed in and we started up the road. I enjoyed their stories greatly, especially those about Bianca. I shall repeat them all to you some day. In trying to explain to me just exactly how bad these Italians are, one of them confided that the Austrians are now building fortifications south of Peroi. Before the others could stop him, he blurted it out. His brother is working on the fortifications, and so he was well supplied with first-hand information. I remembered carefully everything he said, for—who can tell?—the information might be interesting to others.

“At Pozzo Padin I stopped and let them out. They thanked me profusely, and I returned the thanks for their protection against the terrible Bianca. Then I drove on until I came near the farm where I borrowed the horses and wagon. There I stopped, leaving the borrowed things to fate.

“I went to the bridge and slept until noon; then I went to call upon a friend of mine who lives near Dignano. From him I received information regarding the trouble that started us off on these misadventures. It seems that the man who recog-

nized Camastra is slowly recovering in the hospital, but that he is not sure whether it was Camastra or his own grandfather that he saw. He knows only that something hit him a frightful blow. But it was your brother, Signora Rizzo, for it was in my friend's house that Camastra took refuge, and there he stayed for two nights.

“While he was there, word came of the fight at my house. He knows that I escaped, but he heard nothing of the others. Indeed, he did not know that the two pilots were there. He had told Captain Thorpe to return for him Saturday night, which was two nights after the fight. And so, taking his life in his hands, he went back to Point X, and waited there to warn the Captain away. Of course, no airplane came.

“Had he returned to Dignano, I would have met him, but he sent word that he had gone to Corsi. I followed him there, but he left before I arrived. I returned to Dignano, and found that he had come and gone, leaving word for me that I would receive some word from you good people later. I sent word to Penetti that I would be here—and here I am!”

That was as much of the tale as Bob heard. Many of Bianca's spirited digressions were lost in translation.

"But do you think that the police suspect my brother?" asked Mrs. Rizzo.

"I don't know," replied Bianca. "If the man who recognized him in Dignano can remember who it was he saw, the police will be about us like flies. I'd say that we had better take all precautions."

It was after lunch, when Bianca and Bob were in Maniotto's room, that they heard the bell ringing, and some one pounding on the door. They jumped to their feet, and went to the corridor. They heard Mrs. Rizzo go to the door, and enter into argument with two men.

Bianca grabbed Bob's arm and they started for the back stairs. As they reached the first floor, they heard the doctor's voice join in the argument. Bob threw open the closet door, and pushed up the sliding panel; they entered, slipped the panel down, and waited in the black darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

TAKEN PRISONER

THE faint murmur of voices came to them. Bianca put his ear to the small crack between the panel and the floor, and listened. There came the sound of heavy boots on the back stairs; they heard the click of the latch as the door of the closet was opened.

Bob held his breath. The door of the closet slammed shut, and they heard the man walk away. Bianca put his hand on Bob's shoulder and squeezed.

It seemed to Bob that they spent hours waiting in the cubby-hole. The air was suffocating, and he drew large breaths in an effort to get enough oxygen into his lungs. In another minute, he thought, they would be compelled to risk opening the panel. The door of the closet opened again.

"It's I," said Mrs. Rizzo.

They pushed up the panel and crawled out, panting. Even Bianca was somewhat subdued.

"Wow!" exclaimed Bob. "How long were we in there?"

"Just fifteen minutes," replied Mrs. Bizzo.
"It's rather close, I'm afraid."
"Did everything go all right?"
"Yes. I think they are looking for my brother," she said. "They searched the entire house."
"And how about Maniotto?"



"He did just as the doctor told him—pretended to be asleep. The sergeant of police tip-toed in and looked at him, and then tip-toed out again."

"What did they say about Camastra? That they were looking for him?"

"Oh, no. When I went to the door I talked with the sergeant. He had two men with him, and

one of them put his foot against the door so that I couldn't close it. The sergeant said that he had been ordered to make a search of the house, and look at all the occupants. He was quite polite about it, but firm. As I've explained to you before, they are afraid of offending the doctor, and so they don't go any farther than they feel they must. I argued with them, and then the doctor came. He took them into the library, and made the sergeant repeat his instructions. By that time you two were safely in hiding, and so we let them go all over the house—from top to bottom. They departed humbly."

"I wonder if they are looking for your brother."

"It looks that way," she answered. "Perhaps the man in Dignano has given his name."

Bob left them in the library, and went up to Maniotto's room.

"I heard the doctor telling the sergeant," said Maniotto, "that I was critically ill with the fever, and warning him to get out of the room immediately. I kept my eyes shut, and breathed deeply, as though I were asleep, I could feel the sergeant bending over me; then he grunted and went away. My heart was doing hand-springs. And where were you?"

Bob told him about hiding, and almost suffocat-

ing, in the cubby-hole with Bianca. "And I've seen the eighth wonder of the world," he said, laughing.

"What's that?"

"Bianca subdued. He really was—he gasped when we stuck our heads out."

It was late in the afternoon, and Bob was in his room reading, when Mrs. Rizzo came to his door to say that Penetti had arrived. He was in the library, she said.

Bob jumped from the bed, shoved the book under the mattress, and hurried downstairs.

"Hello there, Captain," said Penetti. "Found at last! I've been chasing you all over Istria."

"Hello, Penetti," said Bob. "I'm mighty glad to see you again. You received Bianca's message?"

"Yes. Well, the crowd is together again—all except Camastra, and he is still going around Istria like a whirlwind, stirring up trouble for the Austrians, not to speak of ourselves. Has he been here?"

"No, but the police have."

"So the doctor said. And you and Bianca almost smothered to death in the hole, eh!"

"Yes."

"I tried it myself once. It's a great place."

"What's the news?"

"All the news in the world. You signalled to an airplane the night after I left St. Fosca, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that was your pal—what's his name?"

"Morgan."

"Yes. Since then they've had a boat standing off the coast each night to pick us up, and a man here in Istria looking for us. We came together at Gallesano, and he is waiting at the bridge. The boat will be off Gregorio each night between midnight and four."

"Great! And when do we make a get-away?"

"Ah, there's a problem for you. The first question is: How do we do it?"

"There's something in that, too," replied Bob. "Where's Bianca?"

"He has scooted out again," said the doctor. "He's trying all the sources of information for some news of Camastra."

Bob knew that their adventure was rapidly coming to a climax. The real test of ingenuity and cleverness was about to begin. It was easy enough, he decided, to get into trouble, and become neatly tangled, but far more difficult to get untangled and out of trouble. They were snugly installed at Pola,

living in safety, except for the danger of a successful surprise raid on the house. The problem of getting out of Pola was complex, and it threatened to become more so each day, as suspicion gradually centered on Dr. Rizzo's house. Maniotto, who was to get out of bed for the first time the next day, provided additional complications. How could they take a sick man, so weak that he could not walk five steps, out of Pola and up the coast to Gregorio? Plainly, it was an occasion for the two master minds of the mission, Camastra and Bianca, to get together and use all of their combined wits and energy.

"I presume," said Bob, "that Camastra is the one who will show how to get out, and when to go."

"Yes," answered Penetti, "when we find him."

"Sh-h-h!" said Bob suddenly. They listened.

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"Another Macchi patrol," answered Bob. "I'm going up on the roof and watch them."

He went up stairs to the roof, and saw two Macchi's in the sky approaching the city. They were coming from the north. The noise of the Austrian engines, warming up for their daily performance, reached his ears; four Austrians took off.

The Macchi's sailed over the city; then turned and came back. While the "archies" spattered around them, the two pilots made figure 8's, turning leisurely. The Austrians climbed slowly, none too anxious to enter the fray and apparently hoping that the pilots would go along on their way while trouble could be avoided. But the Macchi's lingered; then one of them started down.

"Go to it, George!" whispered Bob. "Clean up on 'em!"

Then he became aware that something was wrong. George was making no manoeuvre to attack—he was avoiding it! What was he doing? Bob shielded his eyes with his hands and stared up at the Macchi. As the machine turned, he caught the glint of the propeller. It was stopped! George was making a forced landing!

"Oh, George!" muttered Bob. He was dumfounded. Then he began hoping desperately that it was not George. One could easily become confused in spotting machines in the air, and perhaps it was not George at all.

The other pilot hovered overhead for a moment, and then he too started down—following to see what was happening. He pulled up into flying level, and Bob heard the roar of his motor as he opened the throttle. The Austrians swept around

behind the descending Macchi. Not satisfied with taking a prisoner, they were going to try shooting him down—shooting him when he was practically helpless to defend himself.

“You rotten hounds!” exclaimed Bob. “If I ever get back to Venice, I’ll come over here in a Spad and I’ll shoot every blinking one of you down.” After seeing the Pola squadron in action, Bob had the same idea as George about the ease with which one good pilot in a land plane could count off the Austrians.

The other Macchi suddenly pointed nose downward.

“Attaboy!” shouted Bob. “Attaboy! Kick ’em for a goal! Smear ’em.”

An unwary Austrian, closing in for a shot at the disabled Macchi, received the full blast of two machine guns. The plane became enveloped by black smoke, red flames appeared; then the fragments of the planes rained down. The tanks had exploded. The rattle of the machine guns struck Bob’s ears, and it was rapidly followed by the dull blast of the explosion.

Another Austrian made a faint-hearted attempt at an attack, but the Macchi swung around and warded him off. The other two Austrians stood their distances.

Would the pilot—Bob tried hard not to think it was George—would he try landing as far out as possible from Pola, or would he steer for the harbor? (For two days a stiff wind had been blowing, and Bob knew that the sea must be well lashed-up by it. An M5 could not land in rough water without wrecking, and it would surely mean drowning, unless there was a boat handy to pick him up. And, at that, it meant being taken prisoner.

Bob felt relieved when he saw the plane swing about and come down toward the harbor. The other Macchi was close behind it, standing guard.

The disabled machine passed over the Island of St. Pietro. A few seconds later, the pilot levelled off, and the machine sank to the water. Bob could see the pilot rise from his seat; he jumped up and down; then he scrambled out on the right wing.

“Kick her to pieces,” said Bob. He knew that the pilot was sinking the plane; kicking holes in the thin hull and opening the wings. A launch appeared, speeding out to what was rapidly become a wreck beyond all hopes of salvage. The Macchi appeared to be sinking—but not fast enough.

The pilot leaped overboard, and Bob saw the splash as he struck the water. Smoke suddenly

appeared from the plane; then flames that rose up for yards in the air. He had opened the gasoline tank, and touched a match to it. There came a rending explosion, and flaming bits of wood shot up. For a few seconds it rained flame in the vicinity of the machine. All that remained of the plane was a charred mass of wreckage.

The other Macchi swung about and, tipping its wings from side to side as a farewell signal, turned out to sea.

"Pretty work—whoever you are," said Bob, as he watched the plane disappear. Now the Austrians came down, flying over the wreck and watching the launch pick up the pilot. The launch headed for the arsenal.

Bob stood for a moment, looking out over the harbor, before he turned to go down into the house. Try as hard as he might, he could not rid his mind of the idea that it was George who had been taken prisoner.

He stopped at Maniotto's room.

"One of our men came down," he said. "Motor failed him. He landed in the harbor." And then he added; "I'm afraid it was George."

"George!" repeated Maniotto. "What makes you think so? He wasn't injured?"

"No—not injured. I don't know why I'm so

sure it was George, but I have a hunch. You know how it is—how you can spot pilots you know.”

“But it doesn’t always work.”

“No, that’s true enough. I’m going down and see if Bianca has returned. He ought to be able to get some information about it.”

But Bianca had not returned. The others listened wide-eyed as he told them of the fight he had seen from the roof while they had been sitting comfortably in the library.

“Do you think we will be able to find out who it was?” asked Bob.

“Yes,” answered Dr. Rizzo. “I have to see the Commander about an increased allotment of milk for some sick children. I’ll go over to the arsenal now, and ask about it. If Bianca comes, tell him I want to see him. Good-by.”

The doctor rushed out of the house, and up the street.

“How about Austrian prison camps?” asked Bob. “Are they as bad as the German camps?”

“Worse,” replied Penetti. “A man is better off dead.”

There was nothing said for several moments. Bob’s brows were knit, and he was biting his lips. At last he said:

“Penetti, what are the chances of getting

George out of this—taking him back with us?”

“Frankly, there’s mighty little chance. It might be done, but I doubt it. Why, aren’t you in deep enough now?”

“No,” answered Bob. “I’m just beginning to get into action.”

CHAPTER XVII

POLA ARSENAL

"Is the Commandant in?" asked Dr. Rizzo of the sentry posted at the office of the arsenal. He spoke in German.

"Yes," answered the guard. "He's in, but he's busy. I doubt if he can see you now."

"Oh, that prisoner—the aviator?"

"Yes, they're examining him. At first they thought him an Italian, but he isn't."

"Not an Italian!" exclaimed Dr. Rizzo.

"No, and you'd never guess what he is."

"A Frenchman?" hazarded the doctor.

"No."

"An Englishman?"

"No."

"A Russian?"

"No. I told you you couldn't guess. He's an American!"

"An American! Why, I didn't know that there were any Americans in Europe. Are you sure?"

"Positive," replied the guard. "An American."

Then he added, "It seems to me, doctor, that we who are wise will not believe everything we read these days. I believe that more Americans are landing in Europe than the papers say."

"Perhaps. But tell the Commandant that I'm very anxious to see him. I will only take a minute of his precious time."

"I'll tell him," answered the guard. "He may give you a minute. They are waiting for the interpreter to arrive, and so they're not very busy at just this moment."

The guard entered one of the heavy doors. Presently he re-appeared and beckoned to Dr. Rizzo. "He'll see you now. I told him it was very important."

"Thanks."

The doctor entered the Commandant's private office. The Commandant was leaning back in his chair, his eyes ceiling-ward. A few yards away was George Morgan, sitting very erect, his face set. Beside him on the floor was his flying suit, neatly folded. There were two Austrian officers sitting near him. Doctor Rizzo took them all in at a glance.

"Good evening, Commandant," he said.

"Ah, good evening, Rizzo. What's worryin' you?"

"Just a small matter—but one that is very important to me. I trust you're not busy."

"I'm always busy, because I have many things to worry about," answered the Commandant. "My responsibilities are heavy—enormous."

"Yes, that is the penalty of being more able than other men. Your ability is so rare that your



country must take full advantage of it. To lose the least bit would be to lose a great deal, and consequently you are over-taxed. Ah, I can see that, Commandant. I am a doctor, and it is my business to know when men are wearing their lives away working."

Now, if there was any one thing that touched the heart of the Commandant it was flattery. And next to flattery came tender solicitude as to his

health. Having wrangled with the old man for four years, Doctor Rizzo knew how to handle him, and how to soften him.

"Yes," continued the doctor, "I can see that easily. What you need is a good rest, far away from responsibilities. But what can the government do? If another man were put in here in your place, the arsenal—all Pola, in fact, would go to smash and ruin. Ah, that is the penalty you must pay for having ability."

"That's it!" answered the Commandant. "You are a keen man, doctor. I admire you."

"Commandant, as a doctor I tell you that you should go to bed after you have finished this little business." He swept his hand around in the direction of George. "And stay in bed tomorrow, and the next day. Wave all duties aside. Let your subordinates do the best they can without you for two days, and then you will come back to your work with new strength—with the strength of five men. I am a doctor, remember. Disregard my advice, and your family will live to regret it."

"Two days in bed?" asked the Commandant.

"I'd say three days, if you feel that you can possibly arrange it. A day in bed now means a year added to your life. Remember that. You are a sick man."

✓ The Commandant put his hand to his head. Under Dr. Rizzo's spell he could feel himself wilting. "Yes," he repeated, "a sick man—a sick man. I'll do as you say, doctor, if you will promise to come each day and attend me."

"Willingly," answered the doctor. "Gladly. Now, finish your business for the day and do as your doctor tells you."

"I have this man to examine," the Commandant answered, nodding in the direction of George. "We're waiting for an interpreter who speaks English."

"Oh, is he English? I noticed that he's wearing khaki."

"No." replied the Commandant. "You'd never guess it in the world. He's an American!"

"An American!"

Since the conversation between the doctor and the Commandant was in German, George could not understand a word of it, but he knew they were talking about him, and he stirred uneasily.

"I speak English, you know, Commandant," said the doctor. "Let me interpret for you. Ask him a few questions this evening, and then have him sent to a cell to wait until you are feeling better."

"I'm very grateful to you, doctor. And I must be getting to bed. Have a seat, doctor. Ask him what his name is, and what station he comes from."

"With pleasure," answered the doctor, drawing a chair near George, who eyed him suspiciously. Then, speaking in English, he said:

"The Commandant allows me to interpret for you. *Don't look surprised at the things I'm going to say to you. And don't answer any question truthfully, except your name.* What is your name?"

George's heart jumped within him. It required an effort to keep his face from expressing the surprise he felt. Who was this man at his elbow? What was his game?

"George Morgan, Captain, United States Air Service," he answered.

"Ask him what station he comes from," said the Commandant.

"*I am your friend,*" said the doctor, "He wants to know what station you come from."

"Porto Corsini," replied George. He had heard of a station called Porto Corsini, south of Venice.

"*Your pal is in good hands—*He wants to know how many Americans there are at your station."

"He isn't captured?—I'm the only American."

"No. Do everything to delay your examination—Why were you sent to Italy?"

"I understand—I was ordered to Italy, and I came."

"/If you are sent to a prison camp—Were you sent to an Italian squadron because the Americans have no airplanes of their own?"

"No, we have thousands of airplanes," replied George, waiting for the remainder of the first sentence.

"We won't be able to rescue you—Are there many American pilots in Italy?"

"Nearly a thousand," replied George. He must contrive to remain here in the arsenal, instead of being sent to a prison camp.

"I will try to get word to you—What kind of airplanes have they?"

"I understand—American airplanes."

"The Commandant is an old fool—He wants to know what kind of American airplanes."

"So I see—Tell him I don't know."

"Be very polite to him—Where are the American planes?"

"Tell him they are being assembled near Milan."

"We have received the message about the boat

—He wants to know how many Americans are crossing the Atlantic.”

“Thousands are arriving every day,” replied George. “*And that’s the truth.*”

“*The men will take the boat just as soon as they can escape from the city—*He asks if you don’t know that most of the American transports are being sunk by the submarines.”

“*Give my regards to Bob—*Tell him I hadn’t heard anything about the submarines sinking our boats.”

“*I don’t know how we can rescue you—*What was the matter with your airplane?”

“*Do the best you can—*The air line broke and I couldn’t get any pressure on my gasoline.”

“*The Italian pilot with your friend was wounded—*How long have you been with the Italians?”

“*Seriously?—*Just a few days.”

“*He is recovering splendidly—*Did you have anything to do with the insult to the Pola aviators?”

“What insult?” asked George innocently.

“The shoes that were dropped.”

“*Did it make them mad?—*I’ve never heard of it.”

“*Roaring mad—*How many times have you flown over Pola?”

*"I hoped it would—*This is the first time."

The Commandant opened one of the drawers of his desk and took out a package of papers. After a minute of searching, he found the paper for which he was looking, and read it. Then he opened a book and turned the pages until he came to a colored chart.

"Watch out," warned Doctor Rizzo, when the Commandant spoke. {"He wants to know what decoration you are wearing."

The Commandant evidently had a chart showing the ribbons of the different countries.

"The French War Cross," replied George.

"How did you get it?"

"For duty on the French front."

"As a pilot?"

"Yes."

"In the French army?"

"Yes."

*"Watch out—*He wants to know what has become of Bob Thorpe?"

"In the American Hospital in Rome."

*"German spies—*What is the matter with him?"

"He had an operation for appendicitis."

*"Must have reported—*When was that?"

"One week ago yesterday when I left Rome to go to Porto Corsini."

"When you changed from the French—Is he going to join you in Porto Corsini?"

"Not that I know of."

"The Commandant warns you to be truthful. He says that he knows more about you than you know about yourself."

"Bright of him—Tell him I'm always truthful."

The Commandant, having cracked a joke, beamed. He passed the slip of paper he had been reading to Dr. Rizzo.

"He said I could read this to you. It is a German secret service report. 'Adjutants Robert Thorpe and George Morgan, pilots of Escadrille Spad 98, have transferred to American Air Service with ranks of Captains. Both pilots are rated as aces, and both have been instrumental in hampering the work of this service in France.' He says that isn't all he knows about you."

"Put him at the foot of the class," replied George. *"I knew all of that myself."*

"What did the prisoner say?" asked the Commandant in German.

"He said, Commandant," replied Dr. Rizzo, *"that he would not dare tell you anything that was untrue, because your reports are so complete."*

"He had better not," said the Commandant. *"I'll know immediately when he lies to me. For*

instance, about all of the Americans landing in Europe. That is not true."

"He's so clever he ought to be in the side show of a circus," answered George, when the doctor had repeated the Commandant's statement. "Tell him that I had just heard about the troops landing—that I don't know it to be a fact."

That admission pleased the Commandant.

"And now, sir," said the doctor, "I must insist that you go to bed. You are tired and this prisoner can wait. If you ask me, I'll say that this American has a number of important and interesting bits of information that he is keeping back from us. And I'd suggest that you keep him here and examine him again."

"I intend to do exactly that," answered the Commandant.

"But don't examine him until you're feeling better. He can wait, but Austria cannot afford to lose you."

"Thank you, doctor. I'm glad to have your good services at my disposal."

"And if I can be of assistance as your interpreter in this case, don't hesitate to call on me."

"Thank you, doctor. Thank you." He turned to the other Austrian officers in the room. "You can take him away now."

George, with an armed officer on either side of him, passed out of the room.

"Oh," said the Commandant, "didn't you have some business on your mind?"

"So I did—so I did. In worrying about your health, I almost forgot it. I must have a double allotment of milk for about thirty sick children."



"Hang the children!" shouted the Commandant in a fury. "How can I give them a double allotment? I haven't enough for the arsenal, not to speak of the brats in Pola."

"But they must have it."

"Don't say 'must' to me!"

"Calm yourself, Commandant. You *must not* get excited. As your doctor I can say 'must' to you. If you get excited and angry, you invite apoplexy. I warn you—it will bring your death."

The Commandant's wrath subsided.

"Sign the order for the milk, and then get to bed."

"I won't sign the . . ."

"Commandant, I warn you that your end is not far off if you get angry."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed the Commandant. "Here am I, a poor sick, over-worked man, and you come bothering me about milk for the dirty little brats in Pola. But, if I am to be in my death bed soon, let it never be said that I was not generous and kind up to the last. Here, I'll sign the order."

The doctor turned away to hide the smile that was twisting his face. The Commandant's pen scratched. As he handed the order to the doctor, he said:

"But if my men here at the arsenal don't get enough milk, I'll revoke it. I have enough trouble now keeping them from mutiny."

"Thank you, Commandant. I'll tell the children and their parents of your generosity. And remember; to bed, and stay in bed."

"Yes, doctor. And, by the way, that blinking

fool von Katz, of the police, told me that he was going to search your house. Did he?"

"Yes, he sent three men. I can't understand it, of course, but in these days one must submit to orders. They found nothing, and so they went away."

"I told him he was crazy, but he said that orders had come. I really think"—his tone became confidential—"that he had some idea of finding your brother-in-law there. What's his name?"

"Camastra?" asked the doctor. "How stupid! Why, we received news of him two weeks ago through the Red Cross in Switzerland. The poor boy was wounded severely. He is in the hospital."

"I told him he was crazy," replied the Commandant. "I'll report him to headquarters. I can't have the police interfering with my friends."

"That's very kind of you."

"Not at all. Well, doctor, I'll be going off to bed. Remember that you've promised to see me tomorrow."

"I shan't forget."

The doctor left the arsenal and hurried home.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAMASTRA RETURNS

✓GEORGE, between his two guards, walked down a long flight of stone steps, and presently came to a barred gate. One of the Austrians called, and a soldier appeared. He saluted, unlocked the gate, and motioned George to enter. The gate clicked behind him.

He nodded to the guards, who stood watching him through the bars of the gate, and followed the soldier down the corridor. It was dark and damp, and when the breeze from the sea entering through the broken windows struck him, he was grateful that they had not taken his flying suit away from him. They came to another gate, and George found himself in a corridor of cells. Dimly, he could see faces pressed to the little windows in the metal doors. Men called to him, and laughed, but as they spoke in German he could not understand what they were saying. At the far end of the room, the guard stopped and opened a cell. Instead of thrusting him in, and slamming the door, as he had expected, the guard motioned that

he was to wait; then he hurried back to the entrance of the cell-room, and returned with a small lamp.

"That was rather decent of him," thought George, and he spoke the only two words of German he knew—"Thank you."

The guard smiled, and answered in German; George laughed and put his hands above his head to show that he had exhausted his vocabulary.

The faint light of the lamp showed the cell that was to be his until the day came for him to be shipped off to a prison camp—or until something else more desirable happened. It was about six feet long and four feet wide; a flat metal shelf, hinged to the wall and supported by chains, formed the bed; and an ordinary tin bucket completed the furnishings. He tossed his flying suit on the bed and gazed about him. The dark stone walls were covered with moisture, and the floor was littered with trash. An evil smell pervaded the place.

The guard, who had disappeared leaving the door swinging open, returned with a blanket; then he went through the motions of eating. George nodded violently; he was hungry. The guard closed the door; George spread the blanket out on the bed, and sat down.

For the first time since his capture, the realiza-

tion that he was a prisoner struck him with full force. A prisoner in Austria; doomed, perhaps, to live in the dirt and squalor of a prison camp until the war ended. He shuddered at the thought. Homesickness, disgust and despair surged over him, and he bit his lip and set his face.

"Buck up, old fellow," he said to himself. He slammed the bed up against the wall, and caught it with the hook; that gave him some room in which to move about, and motion helped him settle his mind. The prospects were not pleasant, but still, he acknowledged, they might be a whole lot worse. Who was that little man who had come bustling into the Commandant's office to carry on that astonishing conversation with him? "Do everything you can to delay the examination," he had said. "If you are sent to a prison camp, we won't be able to rescue you."

And Bob was here in Pola; Maniotto was wounded and recovering!

George unfastened the hook and let the bed down again. The despair of a moment before had left him, and his mind was filled with the problem of escaping. Obviously, they were planning to rescue him in some way. He sat down again, and rehearsed all the details of the conversation in the Commandant's office.

So deep in thought was he that he scarcely noticed the guard who unlocked the door and entered with a bowl of soup, and a hunk of war bread. The soup was vile stuff, with a nauseous flavor. George smelled it, and put it aside. He motioned for some water. And on bread—hard



and tasteless bread that appeared to be made largely of sawdust—and water, he made his first meal in Austria. A few minutes later, the guard returned and took the lamp.

George took off his coat, shoes, leggings and breeches, and pulled on the flying suit. The fur was warm and comfortable. He spread the blanket out on the metal shelf, and lay down. The chatter

of the other prisoners died away, and he fell asleep.

In the library at the Rizzo house, the doctor was telling of his adventures at the Commandant's office. Bob listened breathlessly, weighing every word, trying to fit them together into some plan of rescuing George from the Austrians.

The doctor laughed heartily over the way he had sent the Commandant to bed. "The old fool!" he said, "He is as healthy as a boy of twenty, but he loves to think himself sick. I twisted him around my finger by telling him that he was a great man, and that he must take care of himself for the sake of his country and his family. The old fool!"

"And you got the milk for the children?" asked Mrs. Rizzo.

"Of course," replied the doctor, showing the signed order.

"What plan have you, doctor?" asked Bob. "I mean about George Morgan. What chance is there?"

"I haven't a plan," confessed the doctor. "I saw an opportunity and I just took it. That's all. Once he is sent to a prison camp, we have no chance at all. And there is precious little chance of getting him out of the arsenal."

"Could we get him away from them as he leaves the arsenal?" asked Bob.

"I'm afraid not. A hundred guards would be after us in a minute."

"How will he be taken to the prison camp?"

"On the train."

"And where is the camp?"

"Near Trieste."

"Could we get him on the train?"

"Possibly. It seems the only chance."

For several minutes they sat thinking.

"Well," said the doctor, at last, "let's sleep on it. I'm going up and see the patient, and then turn in. How about you people?"

"I'm going to bed," said Mrs. Rizzo.

"I think I'll stay up for a few minutes and talk with Penetti." When the others had left them, he said to Penetti; "The man we want to find is Camastra. Camastra and Bianca between them can do this trick, if any two people can. And we'll have to find them just as soon as we possibly can. Bianca is supposed to return tonight, isn't he?"

"Yes. And if he doesn't bring some word of Camastra, I don't know which way we will turn."

They sat until late, discussing the various courses they might take to get back to Venice, and

Penetti told him for the first time of the plan Lazzaro had suggested—the meeting at which Bob should speak to the leaders of the Italian faction in Istria.

“Would you like to do that?” he asked.

“Indeed I would,” answered Bob. “But the first thing to consider is the get-away from Pola with Maniotto and George. After we have done that, the rest can be arranged. I’ll go the limit with you.”

They were preparing to go to bed when the door bell rang.

“Let’s duck,” said Penetti. They hurried out to the back stairs, and waited with the panel up. The doctor answered the door. It was Bianca. Bob slid the panel down, and they went back to the library.

“Gallesano has been raided!” he announced. “Camastra was there. He went out the back door, while the police entered the front; knocked over the guard that had been posted behind, and got away.”

“How did you hear about it?”

“They sent a messenger with the news.”

“What else?”

“It was rumored at Gallesano that the police

had raided this house, and that you had been captured. Camastra is on his way to Pola."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"Will he come to the house?"

✓ "Not until he knows it's safe."

"Is there any rendezvous where we can meet him?" asked Penetti.

"The messenger said that he would go to Antonio's."

"I'll go there," answered Penetti.

"But wait," said the doctor. "Let's hear the full story."

"Well," said Bianca, "Camastra has been over near Fiume, holding meetings. He returned to Gallesano, thinking that he'd find some of us there. All he found was a rumor that we had been arrested. He was dead tired, and he planned to spend the night there—that was last night, or early this morning. He was just getting to sleep when the police arrived. Before they could see him, he went out the back. The woman heard him fighting with the guard, but by the time the police got there, he had gone. He had told her that he was going to Pola, and that he would go first to Antonio's. She passed the word to a boy who

knows me, and who agreed to come to Pola with the message. That's all."

"Now to find Camastra," said Penetti.

"What are you going to do?" asked the doctor.

"Go to Antonio's and see what's happening."

"What is Antonio's?" asked Bob.

"It's a little cafe that's run by a friend of ours."

"Wait, Penetti!" said Bob, catching him by the arm. "I'm going along with you."

"No, no."

"Yes. If I stay around this house a minute longer, I'll go crazy. It's dark out now, and, besides, the risk of going out isn't much greater than the risk of staying here. If the police come, it means that we'll have to go in the cubby-hole. / And if the police do come, they aren't going to stay for fifteen minutes and then go away; this time it will be in earnest and they'll stay until morning. That will mean that Bianca and I will smother to death. The hole is large enough for one, but not for two. And, besides, if I go with you and any trouble starts, you're better off with some one to help you."

"But . . .," began Penetti.

"No one knows me here," interrupted Bob.

"You can't take Bianca around where they'll see

him, because he's too well known and they're looking for him."

"All right," said Penetti. "If you really want to go, get your hat. Get another one—not that thing with a hole in it."

"I presume he might just as well go," said the doctor. "After all, as he says, it's becoming just as dangerous to stay as it is to go. I'll get another hat for you."

He brought a felt hat that matched the dilapidated suit of clothes Bob was wearing. "Don't start trouble," he warned as they went out. "Avoid it—run from it."

"We'll be careful," answered Bob.

It was a great relief for him to stretch his legs again. They went swinging along down the street.

After a walk of five minutes, Penetti turned up a narrow alley-way. In the darkness ahead of them a door opened and three Austrian sailors came out. Penetti and Bob stood close to the wall and allowed them to pass.

"That's Antonio's," said Penetti. "It's a place where the sailors go. If there's much of a crowd, we'll go into the back room. Just follow me."

He opened the door, and they stepped in. It was a low ceilinged, dark room, filled with smoke. At one end was a long wooden counter, where

several sailors were lounging. There were about a dozen men in the room, most of them in uniform.

"Let's sit back there," mumbled Penetti. He led the way to a small table in the rear. As they sat down, a man came out from behind the counter and walked toward them. "Antonio," said Penetti, getting up. He met Antonio in the center of the room, and together they walked back to the counter, talking. Presently Penetti returned, bearing two cups of coffee.

"He hasn't seen any one," he said, as he sat down. "I didn't ask about Camastra—better not to be too specific these days. We'll wait for a little while, and see what turns up."

Penetti lighted his pipe, and lolled back. Bob leaned over the table, occasionally taking a sip of the concoction that passed as coffee. Penetti watched him as he took the first sip, and smiled at the expression of his face.

"Terrible, isn't it?" asked Penetti. "Spill it on the floor if you don't want to drink it. I'll have to go get some more in a few minutes to pay for the privilege of sitting here."

"And who is Antonio?"

"Oh, an old renegade, who isn't to be trusted very far, unless you know more about him than

he does about you." Then he added, with a laugh: "Which I do."

"How is it that you know this country so well, Penetti?"

"I was born in Fiume," he answered. "Most of the men in this service were born here. Camastra, Rizzo, and some others that you don't know; Lazzaro was born in Trieste. We've lived here, and we know all the dialects. The point is that we haven't stayed here constantly, and for that reason we're not too well known. Bianca, for instance, is known all over Istria. These days are dangerous for him. Bianca's work is finished, once he gets back to Italy. They'll not dare send him over again."

"And how long have you been in this kind of work?"

"Since the first day of war. I got through on the last train that ran from Italy to Austria. The next day I was at Bianca's house, and we've been at it ever since. Our work is about ended, I think."

"You mean that it will be too dangerous?"

"No—I mean that there isn't much need of us any longer. Italian sentiment here is so strong that it doesn't need urging. The Austrians can't control the people; it's all they can do to con-

trol the soldiers and sailors. The government keeps sending in new men, taking out the old ones—changing them constantly so that they can't get together and mutiny. And as for the Italians here in Istria—they wreck the supply trains whenever the government tries to take any food from the peninsula."

In groups of two and three, the men in the cafe drifted out. Others came in; and each time the door opened Penetti and Bob eagerly scanned their faces. Once Antonio started as though to come to their table, but Penetti intercepted him. He took the cups and went back to the counter for more coffee.

The door opened again, and two sailors in the uniforms of Chief Petty Officers entered the room. Penetti came down the room.

"There he is!" said Penetti, as he took his seat.

"Where?"

"The larger of those two men."

"In uniform?" asked Bob incredulously. Their backs had been turned toward him, and he had not seen their faces.

"Yes."

Camastra and his companion turned and sauntered to a table directly across the room from Bob and Penetti. Yes, surely enough, it was

Camastra. The other man left the table to get their coffee; and it was not until then that Camastra hazarded a glance at them. For a second, as he looked at Bob, his studied indifference was lost; his eyes twinkled, and a smile played about his lips. He turned away as though to keep from laughing.



Bob bowed his head over the table, shielding his face with the brim of his hat. He too was on the verge of laughter. There was something humorous about the meeting—the incongruity of their costumes, and the seriousness of the situation.

The other man returned with the coffee, and they sat whispering to each other.

“Is he one of our men?” asked Bob.

"I don't think so."

A few minutes later another man entered. He, too, was in the uniform of a Chief Petty Officer, and under his arm he carried an oblong package. He went to Camastra's table and sat down, placing the package on an empty chair beside him. Presently both he and the other Austrian got up, and, after bidding Camastra good-night, left the cafe.

Bob saw Camastra's hand reach out and take the package; then he looked over at them and winked.

Penetti said: "Let's be going."

They rose and went out into the alley.

"Wait here," said Penetti. Presently the door opened and Camastra came out.

"Hello, gang," he said. "How's my circus troupe these days? How are you, Thorpe?"

"Fine."

"Is Rizzo's place safe?"

"Yes."

"In Gallesano I heard it had been raided, and that you'd all been arrested. Scared the life out of me."

"The police came once," said Penetti, "but it's been quiet since then."

"You're sure it's not being watched?"

“Positive.”

“All right,” said Camastra. “You go on along, and I’ll be there within a few minutes.”

They parted, and Bob and Penetti hurried back toward the house.

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE SIX O'CLOCK TRAIN FROM POLA

THE household, having been routed from bed for the second time that night, remained up until dawn, except Maniotto, who slept blissfully through the excitement. They sat in the library, each of them explaining what had happened during the time that the Camastra "circus troupe" had been scattered.

Camastra told a thrilling tale of his adventures. He had covered the entire peninsula, talking with the Italian leaders and stirring up sentiment against the Austrians.

"And what's this last piece of work?" Penetti asked, when he had finished, pointing to the package that Camastra had obtained at Antonio's.

"Oh, that," said Camastra, laughing. "That's nothing but the Austrian navy code book. Catch it."

He tossed the package to Bob, who almost fumbled it because of its weight.

"It has lead covers," explained Camastra, "so that it will sink when they throw it overboard—in

case of capture, you see. It doesn't amount to much, but it might come in handy at headquarters if the Austrians decided to move any of their ships."

"You don't think there's much chance of that?" asked Bob.

"None at all. But I had an opportunity to get it, and so I thought I might as well. And now to bed. We'll think all of this over tonight, and talk it out in the morning."

As they were going upstairs, he said to Bob:

"I'm not so sure about rescuing Morgan. I'll see what I can do, but my first duty is to get you people out of Austria and back to Venice."

"Let's do our best, though," said Bob.

"You bet we will."

It was the middle of the afternoon when they assembled in the library again. Camastra took the floor.

"Bianca, old war horse," he said, "can you get some sort of wagon here in Pola?"

"Yes."

"And can you get out of the city without treading on the toes of the police?"

Bianca shook his head at that. Apparently he couldn't quite figure any other than violent means for getting past the gates.

"All right," said Camastra. "Doctor, you must go see your patient at the arsenal this afternoon. Tell him you want a pass to drive through the city gates tonight to see a patient. You can do that?"

"Yes."

"Also, find out when Morgan is being sent to the prison camp."

"Yes."

"And Penetti, I want you to get us three railroad tickets for Dignano—two for civilians and one for a lieutenant of the Austrian navy. That means two traveling permits, and one set of Austrian navy leave papers. Go to Antonio and tell the old beggar who sent you. Don't let him argue about it; just say that you have to have them by tomorrow morning."

"I understand," replied Penetti.

It was dark when they assembled again.

"Did you get the permit to drive out of the city, doctor?" asked Camastra.

"Here you are," answered Dr. Rizzo, pulling out the slip of paper.

"And how about Morgan?"

"Two officers from the Intelligence Department arrived from Trieste this morning. They have been asking him questions all day long. He leaves

for the camp tomorrow evening on the six o'clock train."

"Good! And how about you, Penetti?"

"Antonio almost wept when I told him what I wanted. He said that he had one foot in the grave, and that we were trying to push him all in. But I was firm with him and he finally said that he would get what we want if it cost him his life."

"Fine! He'll do it, too. He always makes a fuss when I give him a hard job. And now for you, Bianca; it's dark enough for you to be hunting around for this wagon you promised."

"In an hour I will have the wagon. I am yours to command."

Bianca left the room and Camastra turned to the doctor.

"Get Maniotto ready to travel," he said.

"He won't be able to walk, you know," replied the doctor. "He's been out of bed today for the first time. He'll have to be carried."

"We'll carry him. Have you a collapsible stretcher in the shop?"

"Yes."

The doctor left Camastra with Bob and Penetti.

"Is it too early to ask what the game is?" said Bob.

"No," answered Camastra with a laugh. "I'll tell you as far as I know. I'm going to send Bianca out of the city on the pass that the doctor got from the Commandant. He is to drive on to the bridge and meet Lazzaro. They can hide there. Then they will go to Gregorio and meet the boat. That gets Bianca and Maniotto out of the way."

"And George?"

"I don't know about him. If we get a good chance we will take him from the police."

The doctor called from upstairs:

"Thorpe, will you come up here and help dress Maniotto?"

"Right away." He bounded up the stairs.

"Hello there, fellow," said Maniotto. "Something tells me that we're going to travel."

Bob repeated the plans Camastra had outlined. They helped Maniotto into his clothes, and had him ready for the journey by the time Bianca appeared with the wagon.

Camastra's last instructions were; "Let Maniotto sit on the seat beside you until you get out of the city; then open the stretcher and let him lie down. And don't insult the guard as you go out."

"How could you think of such a thing?" asked Bianca with a broad smile.

"Stay at the bridge until two o'clock day-after-

tomorrow morning. Then, if we haven't come, go with Maniotto and Lazzaro to the landing; get the boat and go to Venice. Send the boat back each night at the same time."

"How about the meeting that Lazzaro and I planned?" asked Penetti.

"Talk with Lazzaro about it, Bianca, and use your own judgment. You know the people to get, if you think it safe. That's all. Is everything ready?"

"Yes."

Bianca went upstairs and returned, carrying Maniotto.

"So long, old fellow," said Bob. "I'll see you soon. Good luck."

"So long, Bob."

The doctor opened the door, and Bianca stepped out into the darkness, Maniotto resting comfortably in his arms. A few seconds later they heard the crunch of the wheels on the pavement.

"So much for that," said Camastra.

George, at the end of a long session with the intelligence officers, was informed that he would leave the next evening for the prison camp. He had received no further word from Dr. Rizzo—George knew the doctor only as a little man who had talked to him in a surprising fashion, the even-

ing of his capture—and he had tried to prolong his examination as much as possible. He hedged and quibbled at the questions put to him; always keeping near enough to the truth to delude them, but never making an exact statement. The officers lost patience with him, and several times vented their anger, but he remained calm, and continued with his mis-statements of fact until he had built up a fabulous yarn of what was happening on the other side of the lines.

On the morning of his departure for the camp, he was examined again. Questions which had been put to him on the previous day were repeated; George, aided by his good memory, was able to give the same answers. The Commandant, tired of the bed to which the doctor had condemned him, and anxious to take part in the work of examining the prisoner, came to the office, and sat listening to the conversation in English. Occasionally he growled out a suggestion, but it carried little weight with the intelligence officers.

It was in the office that Dr. Rizzo found the Commandant.

“Ah, disobeying your doctor’s orders, eh?” he said.

“Just for an hour or so,” replied the Commandant. “Duty is more important than one’s

physical welfare, you know. It was necessary that I should be present at the examination of this prisoner."

"Of course. And I presume you're almost through with him."

"Yes. He leaves tonight."

George watched the doctor's face closely. It was evident that they were talking about him, and he would have given much to know what they were saying. The doctor bowed to the Commandant, nodded his head and smiled to George and the two intelligence officers, and then left the room. A few minutes later the examination was concluded, and George was led back to his cell.

Had there been the least opportunity to speak to the doctor, George would have taken the chance. But he was afraid that any mis-step on his part might spoil whatever plans were being made in his behalf, and he had wisely decided to follow the doctor's lead. Now, as he sat on the hard bed and waited for them to come and take him to the train, it seemed that escape was impossible.

The minutes of the afternoon dragged slowly past, until five o'clock came. Then the door of his cell was thrown open; two guards beckoned him out. The time had arrived for him to begin his journey to the prison camp. He gathered!

lying suit in his arms and went into the corridor.

One of the guards produced a pair of handcuffs. George held out both hands, but the man pushed his left hand down; then snapped one of the rings about George's wrist, and the other on his own wrist. He was handcuffed to the guard.

They walked up the steps, and entered the arsenal yard, where a covered wagon was waiting for them. In the sides of the wagon there were small barred windows, and at the end was a barred door. It was obviously designed especially for the purpose of transporting prisoners. Small chance, thought George, of escaping from such a contraption as that. And yet he took good care to glance around him, so that he might be forewarned of any attempt to rescue him.

They entered the wagon; the door slammed, and they rumbled out of the yard. Occasionally through the little windows he could catch a glimpse of the tops of buildings along the street. The sounds of people talking and laughing reached his ears, and he wanted to stand and peer out of the windows, but he decided that it would be better if he showed no activity. There came the sound of a locomotive whistle, and he decided that they were approaching the station.

The wagon stopped and backed-up until the wheels banged against the curb. The guard who was not handcuffed to George left them, and he took the precaution of snapping the padlock on the wagon door. Now seemed the time for action to start, and George's hopes rose high despite the padlock. He was alone with one guard; the driver of the wagon could be put out of commission easily; the handcuffs could be snipped by a heavy pair of wire cutters. . . .

Presently he heard some one rattle the padlock. He waited breathlessly, but when the door swung open he found that it was the other guard.

They left the wagon, and George found himself standing on the platform before a train. People on the platform stopped and looked at him; they formed a circle about the prisoner and his two guards, staring curiously. The guards ordered them out of their way, and led George toward the train.

Once, when they stopped to let a baggage truck pass in front of them, the crowd surged up from behind. George felt some one pinch him, and then pat him on the back twice. He looked behind him quickly, but he could distinguish no one in the crowd he had ever seen before. There were a few soldiers and sailors, and the rest were civilians.

They were all looking at him, but there was nothing more than curiosity in their eyes.

Was it a signal, or just the playful antic of some one in the crowd at their heels? And if it was a signal, what did it mean? Probably that he should be on the alert for something to happen. As they boarded the train, he looked back once again, but he could see no gesture or expression that conveyed meaning to him.

The car was composed of small compartments. A corridor ran along one side, and each compartment had a door leading into it. On the other side of the compartments there were doors opening directly out of the car. By experience, George knew that a running board went the length of the car, serving as a step for people who used these latter doors to leave the train. Without arousing the suspicions of his guards, George took in every detail.

People passed up and down the corridor, sometimes stopping at the door as though to take seats in their compartment. The guards waved them away. Presently, George heard the toot of the conductor's whistle. The train jerked forward.

/ The guards stretched themselves; then the one who was handcuffed to George reached in his

pocket and pulled out a small key. He unfastened the cuff from his own wrist.

"This is hopeful," said George to himself. But his hope received a slight setback when the guard motioned for his left hand, and snapped the cuff over it. At any event, he decided, it was better than being fastened to some one else.

The guards, one on either side of George, put their feet on the opposite cushions, and lolled back. They pulled out their pipes and lighted them, blowing the compartment full of the smoke from the weeds they were smoking in place of the tobacco they couldn't get. The train dragged along at a miserable speed—scarcely fifteen miles an hour, George decided.

Forty-five minutes passed in that way, while George hoped that the guards would drop off to sleep and give him a chance to open the door and jump. But they remained awake. Occasionally people passed through the corridor, and glanced in at them. The train stopped for a few minutes at Gallesano; then started on its way again.

It was becoming dark outside, and the lamps in the corridor sent a faint glimmer of light into the compartment. George sat quietly, hoping that the darkness, together with the steady rumble of the train, would lull his guards to sleep.

Sometimes he would think they were sleeping, and his heart would beat faster; but one of them would remember his pipe and begin puffing again. They had left Gallesano about fifteen minutes behind them when a man in the uniform of an Austrian naval officer stopped at the door. He spoke in German. George glanced up quickly, but he could not see the man's face.

It was evidently a match he wanted, for the guards, showing due respect for the fact that the request came from an officer, raced their hands through their pockets. The officer took the match, and scratched it on the casing of the door. It was one of the sulphur variety, and while he waited for the blue flame to sputter, he spoke again in German. The guards answered.

Then the man touched the burning match to a cigarette. The flame illuminated his face. It was Camastra!

George's heart thumped within him. Casually he pulled his legs back toward the seat, so that he could put full strength into them when the moment came for him to jump.

Camastra leaned against the door, and continued to talk with the guards. His hands were thrust in the pockets of the heavy overcoat he wore. The conversation lagged along for several

minutes; then Camastra's voice suddenly changed. The men jumped; but they did not get to their feet as they had intended. Camastra had drawn two pistols from the pockets of his coat.



CHAPTER XX

THE GET-AWAY

"GET over on the other side, Morgan," ordered Camastra.

George jumped to the other seat. Camastra entered the compartment, and two men appeared behind him. George was on the verge of shouting a warning, when he realized that one of them was Bob.

/"Bob!" he exclaimed.

"George!"

"Yank down those curtains," ordered Camastra. "Close the door." In a second the compartment was secluded from the corridor. "Turn the catch on that door. Now, Penetti, bring out the flashlight." Camastra began to speak in German to the guards; they nodded their heads violently.

"Here, Thorpe, hold one of these guns—and you take the other, Morgan. If they make a move, shoot them. It's their lives or ours—and, personally, I prefer ours. Hold that flashlight over here, Penetti."

Camastra reached into his pockets. "Here goes the last of the doctor's adhesive tape," he said. He yanked one of the Austrians to his feet; and pulled his hands behind him. Working rapidly, he bound the man's wrists together with about ten layers of the tape; then he pushed him into the seat, and covered his mouth with strips of it. The other Austrian received the same treatment.

"Which has the key to those handcuffs, Morgan?"

George pointed to the man.

"Which pocket?"

"Right side—trousers."

Camastra found the key. George held out his hands, and the cuffs went rattling to the floor.

"Now give me that cord, Penetti," said Camastra. He took the cords and tied each Austrian's feet; then he put them back-to-back on the floor of the compartment, and tied them together at their feet and throats. "I think that will hold them for a while," he remarked. "Off with that light, Penetti."

Bob and George shook hands violently, as Camastra fumbled with the lock of the door leading outside. The door swung open.

"Have you got our location spotted, Penetti?" asked Camastra.

"Yes."

"Come on, bunch." Camastra stepped to the running board. "I'll jump first, and the rest of you follow immediately."



"Go ahead, George," said Bob.

As Bob reached the running board he saw Camastra swing off; then George. He jumped, and slid down the side of a small embankment, rolling over several times before he struck the bottom. A few yards ahead of him, he saw

Penetti picking himself up. Together, they ran back until they found George and Camastra.

"Take it easy," said Camastra, and he led off at a jog-trot. Several times he called back warnings of obstacles in the road, and at last he stopped in the shelter of a clump of trees. He was laughing when they came up.

"Wasn't that easy?" he asked. "It worked like a charm!"

Bob didn't bother about answering; he grabbed George with both arms.

"Oh, you old bum, you—I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed.

George was speechless. Several times he tried to say something, but he couldn't. He simply hugged, and pounded Bob on the back. When they released each other, Bob said:

"Say, George, I'd like to have you meet a friend of mine. His name's Camastra."

"It seems to me I've seen you before," said George, laughing. They shook hands. "I'm not even going to try to thank you now," he added. "It was wonderful!"

"And this is Penetti—also one of the world's greatest," said Bob.

"We'd better be starting along," suggested Camastra. "What time is it, Penetti?"

"Half past seven."

"That was pretty quick work. Well, off we go. We can take it easy, now."

"Where are we going, Bob?" asked George.
"To the boat? And where is Maniotto?"

"One at a time," replied Bob, with a laugh.
"You old loafer, you—get taken prisoner, and then get rescued. Why, we're going for Maniotto now. He's at the bridge, where I signaled from that night. Then we're going to the boat. What was the matter with that engine of yours?"

"No pressure in the tank. Where have you been living in Pola? Who was the man who came up that first day I was prisoner, and interpreted for me? Do you know him?"

"Couldn't you get up pressure with your hand pump? That's the fellow I've been staying with. He's Camastra's brother-in-law. Wonderful people!"

"No. The tank must have sprung a leak. I was pumping for dear life, but I couldn't get a flicker out of the needle."

As they walked along, sometimes following trails through woods, and sometimes going 'cross country, they plied each other with questions. By the time they reached the bridge, three hours

later, it seemed as though they had just begun to talk about the adventures they had had.

"Wait here," said Camastra. "I'll go ahead and make sure that everything is all right." A few minutes later he returned. "Come along. They're waiting for us."



They entered the hiding place and found Maniotto, Bianca and Lazzaro. Maniotto was lying on his stretcher.

"Oh, Thorpe," said Camastra, "Bianca has arranged that meeting for you. It's at Peroi. You'll go?"

"You bet."

"And Lazzaro has your uniform for you."

"Where did it come from? Who got it?"

"Penetti."

"Did you, Penetti?"

"Yes, I thought you might need it."

Bob took the uniform and began taking off the old suit of civilian clothes.

"Penetti," he said. "I think that ten men, such as you and Camastra and Bianca could lick the whole Austrian army."

"Well," replied Penetti. "I'd want you as one of the ten."

"I'll go with you," said Camastra. "You're not too tired to hit it off now?"

"No."

Once again they started 'cross country.

"I hope that a few wrinkles will drop out of this uniform before we get there," said Bob.

The uniform, which had been wet through by several rain storms, looked very little like the one that Bob had worn the night he made his last landing in Austria.

"That doesn't make much difference."

"And what sort of a meeting is this?"

"Propaganda," answered Camastra. "Bianca and Lazzaro have gathered together about fifteen Italian leaders. I'll speak to them first; then you'll be the surprise party."

On the outskirts of Peroi they stopped at a farmhouse. Bob lingered in the darkness, while Camastra talked with the man who came to the door. Then Camastra entered the house, and fifteen minutes passed before he returned.

"Thorpe," he called.

"Yes."

"Come in."

As Bob entered the house, Camastra turned to the people who were seated in the room and spoke in Italian. There came a murmur of surprise; then Camastra turned to Bob, and said:

"They want you to say a few words to them. I'll interpret."

"I didn't know I was to make a speech."

"That's all right—hop to it."

"Patriots of Italy," Bob commenced, "these days I have spent working with you against the tyrant Austria will live in my memory as the most wonderful days of my life. I am here in your country—and this will be part of Italy before many months have passed—as one small representative of America. There are millions more like me in the United States, and they are coming across the Atlantic, thousands a day, anxious to serve the cause of liberty—to help you in your struggle against Austria, and Germany."

"Good stuff," said Camastra. "Shoot it to 'em."

Bob told them something of the war effort being made in the United States, and he denied the German reports of transports sunk by their submarines. He ended by saying:

"Long live the allies! Long live Italy!"

From all sides they pressed around him, shaking his hands, embracing him.

"We'd better be getting along now, Thorpe," said Camastra. "That was great stuff you gave them. By tomorrow it will be all over Istria. It will be a sensation."

Once again Bob shook hands.

"Here, Thorpe," said Camastra, "this man wants to give you a good luck piece." Bob took the Austrian coin that was handed to him. "He says it was in the pocket of the Austrian Crown Prince when he was killed; hence it should be a good talisman for every lover of liberty."

Bob thanked the man, and put the coin in his pocket.

"Off we go," said Camastra, as they stepped out of the house. An hour's walk brought them to Gregorio, where a meeting place had been arranged with the others. They found them sheltered in a clump of trees not far from the beach.

"Signal them, Penetti," ordered Camastra.

Penetti went to the water's edge and flashed the electric lamp—three long, and three short. Presently they heard the hushed beat of the engines, and on the water they could distinguish the boat coming toward them. It stopped about five yards from shore, and Penetti waded out.

"All right," he called back.

Bianca picked Maniotto up, and Bob folded the stretcher; then they waded to the boat. Those on board grabbed their hands and helped them aboard.

The crew shoved off from the beach, and headed the bow of the boat toward Venice. The engines began turning over more rapidly, and behind them they could see the wake, glowing in the faint moonlight. For more than a mile they proceeded quietly; then Camastra ordered "full speed." The mufflers were removed from the exhaust, and the engines roared. White spray was thrown up at the bow, and it splattered down on them.

It was still dark when they were challenged at the entrance of Venice harbor. A searchlight was thrown on them; then they were signaled ahead.

Colonel Martinelli, summoned by an excited

guard, rushed down to meet them. "Camastra," he called.

"Yes, Colonel, here I am."

"Bravo! And who's with you?"

"The whole bunch. Every one of them, and more besides. Morgan is here, too."

In the darkness, the Colonel rushed from one to the other, shaking hands, slapping their backs, and hugging them.

"Come to the office," he said. "Here—two of you guards, get hold of this stretcher. And you—you run and drag the cook out of bed. Tell him to get something to eat—lots of it, and immediately. Anything he's got in the kitchen—everything! Hurry! Ah, Captain Thorpe, we've been worried about you. And you, Captain Morgan, we didn't expect to see you again until the end of the war. And, Maniotto! Do your wounds pain you?"

"No, Colonel, I'm perfectly comfortable," replied Maniotto, laughing. The Colonel, all unmindful of such a thing as military dignity, was running about so excitedly that his bath robe was swinging behind him.

In the office an orderly was feeding fuel into the stove; another was clearing the tables of papers, preparing for the food. Sant Andrea

was in full activity, preparing a royal welcome.

"Take off your wet clothes," ordered the Colonel. "The orderly will hang them near the stove to dry. Here you, orderly, go into my room and bring blankets—all you can find. Ah, Camastra, it's a wonderful day!"

The orderly returned with the blankets, and they tossed wet clothes to him; rolled themselves in the blankets, and then settled down in chairs around the roaring fire. Presently the Colonel disappeared into his quarters, after calling to his orderly, "Get headquarters on the telephone." They could hear him talking into the instrument, reporting their return.

Bob and George engaged in a rapid fire of questions and answers, trying to reach the point where they could begin a normal conversation. The cook, followed by three soldiers, entered the room with food. The smell of it stopped conversation.

Colonel Martinelli stood in the doorway watching them, and smiling. His eyes went from one to the other, as though he were counting them to be sure that they had all returned. "Don't hurry," he said. "We'll talk when you're through eating. And, in the meantime, I might be getting some clothes on."

He returned a few minutes later, and waited while the soldiers cleared away the plates. When they left the room, he said:

"The General congratulates you upon your return. Tomorrow, Camastra, he will hear your report; and he tells me to thank every one of you for the valiant service you have rendered. Also, he says . . . but I'll tell you that later. Now for the story. Camastra, the floor is yours."

Camastra told in detail all that had happened since the night when Bob piloted him to Istria; sometimes he called upon one of them to supplement his story. At last he reached the Italian meeting at which Bob had spoke.

"My friends," he said, "Austrian morale in Istria is wrecked, and one of the finest pieces of work in wrecking it was Captain Thorpe's speech at Peroi. It will go down in the history of *Italia Irredenta*. Istria is ours! Istria is Italy."

"Viva Italia! Viva Italia!" they shouted at the top of their voices.

Dawn was streaking the windows when Camastra reached the end of his story.

"And now," said the Colonel, "I will tell you what else the General said. I proposed your names for certain honors, and he said that his

first official act this morning would be to sign the citations. To Camastra goes the Gold Medal of Italy. As the leader of this expedition—and of numerous others, as you all know—he deserves the highest honor that Italy has to give. To Captains Thorpe and Morgan the General awards the Silver Medals, together with the royal medal of the Cross of Savoy.”

Bob and George clutched each other and squeezed.

“To Bianca, Maniotto, Penetti and Lazzaro the General awards Silver Medals. And I shall make the same recommendation for Dr. Rizzo. His medal will be held for him until the war is over—and I think that will be soon. And now to bed.”

They unwound themselves from the blankets, and pulled on their dry clothes. For a moment no one spoke. It was difficult to realize that the end of their adventure had come; that the simple act of shaking hands and saying good-night would close it, make it part of the irrevocable past. And Bob thought, as he stood looking at them, that he had never heard of finer, more valiant fighters.

A half hour later they entered their rooms at the hotel.

“Well, fellow,” said Bob. “Here we are—home again.”

"Yep." They shook hands.

"And the battle of Venice has been a pretty warm one, hasn't it?"

George nodded.

"You know," continued Bob, "it hurt to say good-by to those chaps. In a way, I'm sorry it ended so soon. I suppose we got out just about three jumps ahead of the police, but it seems to me that our little bunch could have cleaned up on all the Austrians in Istria."

"Yes. Fighting on this front is going to be pretty tame after all the excitement on the other side. It's fine that we're going to get the Silver Medal and the Cross of Savoy, isn't it?"

Bob smiled. "Won't we look like prize stuff when we get home? Just imagine walking down Main Street again! Oh boy! I'm going to get an Iron Cross and hang it on Rip's tail." Rip was his Airedale. "Then he can wag the Iron Cross behind us."

They both grinned at the prospect of being home.

"Well," continued Bob, "the fight isn't over yet. We're just getting under way. Watch out, you Germans! Something tells me that something hard is going to hit you soon! I wonder what's

been happening in the world since we dropped out of it."

On the table there was a stack of newspapers, left each day by the hotel valet. Bob picked up the top one, and began to read the war news. "Look here, George," he said, "can you make this out? It sounds to me as though the Germans had started another offensive in France." For a minute they struggled with the Italian. "That's exactly what it is—they're starting after Amiens."

They looked at each other without speaking.

"George," said Bob at last, "are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"I'm afraid so," replied George, laughing.

"Then tomorrow we'll send a request to go back to the French front. I want to feel a Spad under me again."

"Same here."

"It's a go!"

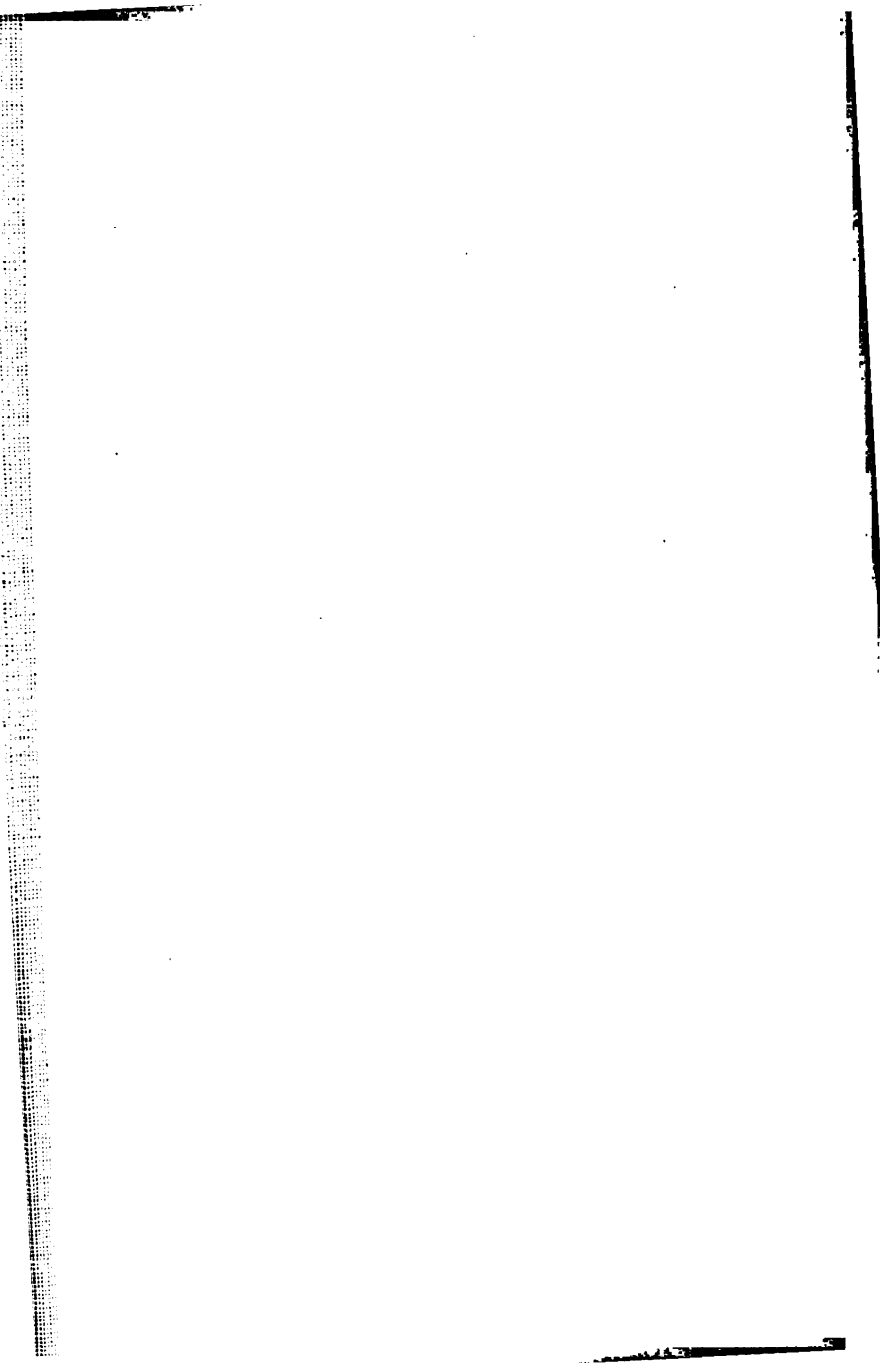
Solemnly they shook hands.

THE END

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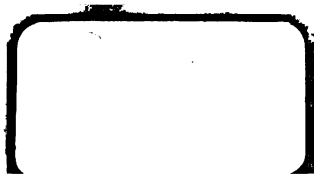
The next volume of this series, **BOB THORPE, SKY FIGHTER, IN THE AMERICAN AIR SERVICE**, following the adventures of the boys until the end of the war, is in preparation.





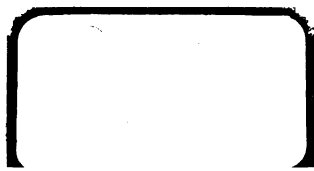


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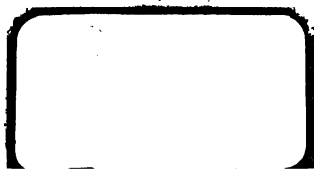


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